



NAROWAL: Rescue 1122 personnel evacuate villagers after 'high flood' in River Ravi threatened communities living near the usually dormant waterway.—Dawn

Govt rushes evacuations as Punjab rivers in 'high flood'

- Authorities see high risks as Chenab, Ravi and Sutlej filled to brim; Indus at 'low flood'
- At least 10 districts on high alert as more than 24,000 relocated amid flooding of low-lying areas; heavy rain likely in next two days
- GB villagers await govt help to ease their suffering; three locals rewarded for timely Glof warning; PM likely to visit region tomorrow

By Imran Gabol and Jamil Nagri

LAHORE/GILGIT: As Punjab braces for a "high flood" in almost all eastern rivers prompting mass evacuations, thousands of people affected by glacial and flash floods in Gilgit-Baltistan earlier this month await government's help amid a shortage of essentials.

Rescue 1122 spokesperson Farooq Ahmad said that more than 24,000 people had been relocated from the low-lying areas of the Indus, Chenab, Ravi, and Sutlej rivers since Saturday. These rivers were experiencing low to high flooding due to torrential monsoon rains in the catchment areas and more rain was expected over the next 48 hours.

The evacuation operation was

conducted in Kasur, Okara, Pakpattan, Bahawalnagar, Vehari, and Narowal, Mr Ahmad said, as a high alert had been issued in Kasur, Okara, Pakpattan, Bahawalnagar, Vehari, and Narowal in light of a flood alert by India.

Meanwhile, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) also issued a flood alert

India shared flood warning bypassing IWT, FO confirms: Page 3

in Punjab due to heavy rains. There is a risk of flooding in the upper reaches of these rivers due to heavy rain likely in the next 48 hours. There is a risk of "high to very high" flooding in the Chenab, Ravi and Sutlej rivers,

whereas urban flooding was also expected in the Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Gujranwala divisions.

'High-level flooding'

A high-level flooding warning had been issued at the Harike location of the Sutlej River: the upstream and downstream areas of Harike were facing a high-level flood situation. The water flow in the Sutlej and adjacent rivers would further increase.

There was a low flood situation at Kalabagh and Chashma in the Indus River, while the water flow was at a normal level at Tarbela and Taunsa. There was a high flood situation at Ganda Singh Wala in

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Omar Ayub, Shibli Zartaj among 75 sentenced over Faisalabad mayhem

By Tariq Saeed

TOBA TEK SINGH: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Faisalabad on Monday sentenced key PTI leaders Omar Ayub, Shibli Faraz and Zartaj Gul and 72 others to up to 10 years' imprisonment and ordered the confiscation of their properties for their involvement in an attack on former interior minister and PML-N leader Rana Sanaullah Khan's house during the May 9, 2023 riots.

While pronouncing the verdict, Judge Javed Iqbal Sheikh of the ATC also acquitted 34 others, including former federal minister Fawad Chaudhry who quit the PTI in the wake of the May 9 riots and PTIMNA Makhdoom Shah Zain Qureshi,

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for want of evidence.

Among the convicts, 59 opposition party leaders and workers, including Omar Ayub, Zartaj Gul, Shibli Faraz, Kanwal Shozeb, MPA Rai Murtaza Iqbal, MNAs Rai Hassan Nawaz, Sheikh Rashid Shafiq (nephew of former federal minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad), ex-minister Ashraf Khan Sohna, Farkhunda Kokab and Muhammad Ahmad Chatha, were awarded 10-year jail terms, while 16 others including, MPA Sheikh Shahid Javed, were sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Just like other lawmakers who were disqualified after their recent convictions in May 9 cases, the members of

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PTI plagued by uncertainty over by-elections

- Despite Aleema's pronouncements, political committee votes to field candidates on SIC tickets; final decision expected after legal team meets Imran today
- Insiders say fear of losing majority in KP Assembly, ceding political space in Punjab behind 'change of heart'
- Drama unfolds after Monday's meeting as Salman Akram Raja announces decision to quit as secy general

By Ikram Junaidi and Mansoor Malik

ISLAMABAD/LAHORE: A tug of war within the opposition PTI over whether to participate in the upcoming by-elections for national and provincial assembly seats — vacated after the recent dis-

of members voted against the decision to boycott by-polls.

This goes against the opinion reportedly expressed by incarcerated party founder Imran Khan, whose sister Aleema has conveyed on a couple of occasions his intention to steer clear of by-elections, so that the party isn't seen as legitimising the process.

The party has already obtained stay orders against the de-seating of key opposition leaders, such as Omar Ayub and Shibli Faraz. It has also, albeit reluctantly, nominated replacements while the party pursues legal options.

But faced with threats on multiple fronts — including the possible loss of majority in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly due to future disqualifications, a

KP lawmakers elected on reserved seats refuse to take oath for second time: Page 8

qualifications of a number of key lawmakers — will weigh heavily on party leaders as they meet Imran Khan today for a final decision in the matter.

Insiders told *Dawn* the party's political committee — in its meeting on Monday — had a change of heart after a majority

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Five security men martyred in clashes across KP

Three civilians among the slain; seven terrorists killed in Upper Dir, Hangu engagements

Dawn Report

PESHAWAR: Five security personnel and three civilians, including a two-year-old child, embraced martyrdom while several policemen sustained injuries as clashes between security forces and militants continued over the weekend and on Monday

in various parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. At least seven terrorists were also killed, officials and sources said.

In Upper Dir and Lower Dir districts, officials and sources said five suspected militants were killed and seven policemen injured late on Sunday night during fierce clashes between the security forces and the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). They said the exchange of fire in the Dobando area of Upper Dir continued for several hours. Two civilians from Hatnar Dara, caught in the cross-fire, lost their lives.

A senior official of the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of

police told *Dawn* that the bodies of all five terrorists were in police custody. They might have links across the border in Afghanistan, he said.

In Lower Dir's Lajbook Dara area, heavy firing broke out between police and militants. Though no casualties were reported from this clash, tension gripped the area as the attackers torched police vehicles including two pick-up trucks and a car, locals said. Sharing the footage on social media, the outlawed TTP claimed they had "seized the vehicles and destroyed them". Police officials, however, claimed the situation was under control. "We will never bow down to the mischief of the Kharijites

(militants)," a police officer said.

Cop martyred in Bajaur

In Bajaur district, a policeman from Lower Dir was martyred in militant firing. Head Constable Shah Wazir Khan was laid to rest in his ancestral village Chansaruno Talash with official honours. Besides Lower Dir District Police Officer Abdul Salam Khalid, SP Elite Force Fahd Khan, Col Abrar of 184 Wing Dir Scouts, other security officials and local elders, a large number of area people attended the funeral.

Speaking on the occasion, DPO Khalid said the sacrifice of the fallen policeman would never be forgotten.

He assured that the police would continue to stand by the families of martyrs in all circumstances.

Hangu, Khyber attacks

In Hangu district, militants mounted a late-night attack on the Tora Warai FC fort. As a result, two personnel of Hangu scouts were martyred, while several others were injured. In the ensuing gun battle, two militants were also killed.

In Tirah valley of Khyber district, two soldiers were martyred in a terrorist attack on a security post.

Sources said that an unspecified

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Israel Plagels 5 journalists in strikes on Gaza hospital

GAZA: Five journalists were among at least 20 people killed on Monday when Israeli strikes hit a hospital in the south, prompting a global outcry.

Reuters, the Associated Press and Al Jazeera all issued statements mourning their slain contributors, while the Israeli military said it would investigate the incident.

The war on Gaza has been one of the deadliest

for journalists, with aro-

At OIC, Pakistan outlines 7-point path to peace in Gaza:

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und 200 media workers killed over the course of the nearly two-year Israeli assault, according to media watchdogs.

Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said “the toll so far is 20 martyrs, including five journalists and one member of the civil defence”, after strikes hit Khan Yunis’s Nasser Hospital — a large medical complex that has been targeted several times by Israel.

Bassal said an Israeli explosive drone hit a building at the hospital, followed by an air strike as

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Govt, opposition spar over Maryam's Japan tour

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Entourage comes under scrutiny; PTI's Waqas claims bank borrowing spent on excursion; Azma says PTI will consume in its own frustration

By Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE: The Punjab government and opposition Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) have been wrangling over "exorbitant spendings, chartered jet and private persons in the delegation" of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's Japan's five-day tour.

Ms Nawaz concluded her Japan visit on Monday and reached Thailand. Questions are also being raised on social media regarding CM Maryam's 'official visit' to Japan, in which 'private individuals', including her family members, as also a part.

It is being argued that even if such participants claim to bear their own expenses, the practice undermines the sanctity of official delegations and blurs the line between state affairs and personal interests.

Questions are also being raised on social media platforms over the inclusion of private persons as part of her visit, causing a huge sum of money to the exchequer.

Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari, who is also part of the CM delegation to Japan, rejected a list of the 'participants' of the CM's visit circulating on social media, calling it "a pack of lies." She said Pakistan and Japan were enter-

ing a new era of diplomatic cooperation, but certain anti-national elements were trying to malign this relationship with disinformation and propaganda.

"For the first time, a woman CM made a 'historic' visit to Japan and the malicious campaign against this milestone is nothing short of a shameful act of hostility against the country's progress. The individuals (the Sharif family members and its friends) mentioned in the social media list were not part of the 'official government delegation'. Only officially nominated delegates had their expenses covered by the government, while all others covered their own costs privately," she said.

Ms Bokhari said those pained by Pakistan's cooperation with Japan in urban development, technology, and youth skills enhancement must accept that the nation is moving forward. "The opposition PTI has nothing to offer except falsehood and propaganda. Just like in the past, it will continue to consume in its own frustration," she added.

On the other hand, the PTI strongly criticised Maryam Nawaz for her foreign trip to Japan, demanding full disclosure of public funds 'squandered' on the tour.

"What did Punjab really gain from Maryam Nawaz's Japan visit? Questions persist over public spending, use of a chartered jet, and the actual outcomes beyond photo optics and promises," it asked.

PTI Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram termed Maryam's trip a "wasteful" excursion at the expense of the poor nation's hard-earned money, undertaken when the country was navigating its 'worst-ever' economic crisis.

He pointed out that as per the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), the Punjab government borrowed a staggering Rs405 billion in just first 38 days of the current

fiscal year 2025-26 (July 1 to August 8), which were not utilised for any public welfare rather wasted on foreign trips, lavish advertisements, and political image-building.

"The people of Pakistan demand a full and transparent disclosure of how much has been spent on these useless advertisements and foreign excursions. The 'fake' CM Punjab must clarify whether her Japan trip, along with dozens of cronies, family members and sycophants, was paid from her personal pocket or from the funds of the Punjab and federal governments," he said.

Analyst Imtiaz Gul said on X: "Massive advertisement campaign on @MaryamNSharif Japan visit: Isn't it an affront to the poor of Punjab? Has she conquered Japan? Do donors ask about the rationale of the precious funds being spent on personal projection?"

Earlier, a local TV channel citing official documents had claimed that the Punjab government allocated Rs160 million for the CM's Japan trip which included expenses for luxury hotel stays in Japan and Bangkok, luxury cars for transport and diplomatic gifts.

Political observers are of the view that foreign visits by elected leaders should strictly focus on advancing provincial and national interests through professional representation, rather than projecting political families. They warn that such practices not only set a poor precedent but also raise concerns of nepotism, misuse of protocol, and dilution of credibility in the eyes of international counterparts.

YASMIN: Incarcerated former Punjab health minister Dr Yasmin Rashid has questioned whether the blue book allows a chief minister to use a Pakistan Air Force plane for a foreign tour and asked

whether other three provinces' chief ministers could get the same privilege and protocol.

In an open letter sent from Kot Lakhpat Jail on Monday, Dr Rashid said she was astonished at the idea CM Maryam Nawaz was floating after foreign visits.

"Ms Nawaz went to China and wanted to replicate the health system of China and now she wants to replicate the health system of Japan besides following its health insurance policy," she commented.

She stated that she could have got these ideas from her upon visiting Kot Lakhpat Jail because she had done a lot of research on health insurance and added that this programme was successfully running in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. She said the health insurance policy was running well in Punjab but she (Maryam Nawaz) discontinued it for being afraid of Imran Khan.

"The PTI government's health insurance policy was appreciated at all forums in the world," she stated.

Dr Rashid regretted that Punjab had now become a police province as police had been criminalised and weaponised against the public. "Arresting Aleema Khan's sons after 27 months is the worst sort of fascism that the people are facing," she said and added police arrested four children including girls of 3-7 years from her constituency just because they were distributing sweets following bails granted to former premier Imran Khan.

"How low can you go," she asked and said the incumbent Punjab government should be ashamed of itself on this reign of terror in Punjab.

(Ikram Junaidi and Mansoor Malik also contributed to this report)

Railways to be provided FC troops for security of trains, tracks

The federal force will also be used to retrieve railway land from grabbers

By Khalid Hasnain

LAHORE: The interior ministry has decided to provide the Federal Constabulary (FC) force to the Pakistan Railways (PR) for the security of tracks and rolling stock, retrieving its precious commercial land from illegal occupants in major cities, and elimination of encroachments through joint operations.

Both interior and railways' ministries also agreed to launch Diesel Multiple Units (DMUs) -- a modern shuttle train -- between Islamabad and Rawalpindi to provide better facilities to the passengers.

"We are ready to provide you our FC

for launching joint operations to retrieve the precious commercial [railway] land from grabbers, in major cities," Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi told railways minister Hanif Abbasi during a meeting held here at the PR headquarters on Monday.

During the meeting, Mr Naqvi was briefed about the railway system, projects and revenue generation, etc by senior officers. He was also apprised of the challenges being faced by the department and strategies to overcome these problems.

Mr Abbasi, on the occasion, told the interior minister about the upgrade of various railway stations, including Lahore, Rawalpindi, Khanewal, Okara and Faisalabad.

While discussing the issue of absence of any shuttle train service between the twin cities (Rawalpindi and Islamabad Margala stations), Mr Naqvi assured Mr Abbasi that senior officials of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) would

soon contact the railway's officers concerned to discuss a plan in this regard.

In response, Mr Abbasi agreed to launch a DMU shuttle train between the twin cities.

According to a senior PR officer, DMU train consists of two specially designed small locomotives attached to a rake of 4-5 modern coaches on the front and rear ends, having a capacity to carry around 400 passengers.

During the meeting, the security measures for the PR assets were reviewed in detail. The interior minister was briefed on special measures taken for the security of railway lines and trains across the country, particularly in Balochistan.

"Every possible measures will be taken to ensure a foolproof security of railway tracks and trains, and full assistance will be provided to the Railway Police," said Mr Naqvi, adding that the passengers' safety was his top priority.

He also appreciated the measures taken by Mr Abbasi to improve the PR's

performance.

The PR Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Aamir Ali Baloch, Inspector General of Railway Police Rai Tahir and other senior officials also attended the meeting.

"The meeting remained very productive, as the interior minister has agreed to provide us FC troops for launching a coordinated operation to retrieve our precious commercial land and eliminate encroachments," Mr Abbasi told Dawn after the meeting.

Meanwhile, Mr Abbasi reprimanded the PR's mechanical department for slackness in resolving various issues. "The rolling stock is the lifeline of the railway, and all efforts to keep it running in a good condition must be made," he said while presiding over a meeting.

"Nothing should be pushed under the carpet, as everything must be crystal clear," he said, adding that the officers concerned should avoid buying any parts for the trains without the third-party evaluation.

Another found involved in bank fake jewellery scam

By Waseem Ashraf Butt

GUJRAT: Another goldsmith has been found involved in the Rs90 million gold jewellery scam of National Bank of Pakistan's three branches and he is a brother of the goldsmith already booked in the case.

Their jewellery shop in the city's main Sarafa Bazaar has been sealed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

A senior FIA official identified the jewellers as Muhammad Saqib alias Munna and his brother, Abdul Razzaq alias Chand, sons of M Khalil and residents of the Jattuwakal area of the city. Both these suspects are the proprietors of Saqib Jewellers (approved goldsmith of NBP Gujrat region).

The FIA official added that the jewellers were found involved in all three cases lodged with the FIA after misappropriation/replacement of original gold being kept in the NBP by customers.

A spokesman for FIA Gujranwala said the case of replacing original gold jewellery with fake one in three branches of the NBP first surfaced in Mangowal branch on July 25. The new bank manager, Arshad Mehmood Shahid, of Mandi Bahauddin had taken the charge of the branch and he found some gold jewellery bags tampered with in the strong room. He informed his high-ups who launched an inquiry. Later, the case was sent to the FIA for further action.

The first case was lodged

against the Mangowal NBP branch cashier, Saadat Ali Bhatti, and the previous manager Khalid Mehmood. The FIA and NBP management later widened the scope of the inquiry to the other batches of the zone and so far at least Rs90m worth of jewellery had been found replaced with fake one.

The FIA official said raids were being conducted to arrest both the goldsmiths.

Meanwhile, the agency has got the physical remand of five suspects until Aug 29 whereas the sixth accused Saadat Bhatti had been sent to the district jail on judicial remand.

A senior official of NBP said the bank was bound to pay back the original amounts of the scam affectees but it might take some months in the verification processes.

Stage actress held after 'rape of maid by five' at her house

LAHORE: Police have arrested a stage actress on Tuesday for her alleged involvement in the torture and repeated rape of a minor girl, she had employed as home help, some days ago.

Nawab Town police registered a case against the actress, her employee and four unidentified men under rape and torture charges.

The police later arrested the actress and started investigation.

According to the FIR, the complainant, the 16-year-old victim's mother, stated that her daughter was employed at the house of the stage actress on Aug 8.

She stated that a man, an employee of the actress, living in the upper portion of her house, served her daughter a drink spiked with some intoxicant and raped her on the night of Aug 14.

She further alleged that when

her daughter woke up around 11am the next day, the suspect again made her drink the intoxicant and called four other men, who repeatedly raped the girl for the next two days.

She stated that on finding an opportunity, her daughter escaped from the actress' house on Aug 18, reached home and narrated them her ordeal.

She added that her daughter was bleeding when she returned home.

She alleged that during her daughter's illegal detention for four days, the actress kept the girl locked in a room, subjected her to torture and hurled threats of dire consequence at her if she informed anybody about the rape episode.

She demanded immediate and stern action against the actress and other suspects. — Staff Reporter

IED defused near Punjab-KP border

LAHORE: The Dera Ghazi Khan police on Tuesday recovered an improvised explosive device (IED) planted in a graveyard near the Punjab-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa border.

The terrorists had planted the IED to target security forces in the tribal area of Jadaywali in the jurisdictions of Vehova Police Station.

A joint team of Dera Ghazi Khan Police, Special Operations Unit (SOU) and Elite Force conducted a search operation in the border region. During the sweep, the IED was found.

The Bomb Disposal Squad was called and the device was defused.

Regional Police Officer (RPO) retired Capt Sajjad Hassan Khan closely monitored the entire operation and commended the police teams for their swift response.

District Police Officer (DPO) Tariq Vilayat emphasized that extremist elements would not be shown any leniency and vowed that strong action against terrorists would continue. He reassured the people that every possible step was being taken to protect their lives and property. — Staff Reporter

NCCIA summons fashion designer in transperson tirade case

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) has summoned fashion designer Maria B for Tuesday (today) for defaming the transgender community on social media.

The NCCIA in a notice to her asked her to appear before an inquiry team on a complaint that she defamed the transgender community on social media. It said in case of non-appearance it would be assumed that she had nothing to present or state in her defence.

Lahore police last week booked around 60 transgender persons and others and arrested some of them for allegedly organising an "objectionable" private party after Maria B uploaded photos and videos of it on her social media accounts.

Later, a magistrate dismissed the case against transgender persons after no incriminating material was available on record which connected the accused persons with the commission of alleged offences.

Fashion designer Maria B initially posted videos on her social media accounts, demanding action against "transgender activists" that she claimed featured in the clips, terming such gatherings "against the moral values of the country."

Islamabad-based transgender rights activist Nayyab Ali said in a post on X that individuals seen in the video were "not trans activists" and had "nothing to do with our movement." Ali also alleged that the video was shot at a private party and only went viral after Maria B posted it, saying, "If it's fahashi (vulgarity), then who spread it to millions? Maria B did. That's a crime itself."

Human rights activists raised concerns over the potential misuse of morality laws on social media. "While obscenity laws exist, their vague wording often leads to arbitrary enforcement, disproportionately targeting marginalised communities," said a legal expert, requesting anonymity.

Govt rushes evacuations as Punjab rivers in 'high flood'

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the Sutlej River and a medium flood at Sulmanki. Similarly, there was a medium flood situation at Marala and Khanki on the Chenab River. About reservoirs, Tarbela Dam was completely full, while Mangla Dam was 76pc. Among the Indian dams, Bhakra was 80pc, Pong 87pc, and Thein Dam was 85pc full.

Separately, the National Emergencies Operation Centre (NEOC) issued a flood alert for the River Ravi over the next 48 hours, indicating a medium-level threat. According to hydrological data, sustained moderate to heavy rainfall in the catchments of River Ravi and associated nullahs had resulted in increased inflows at Thein Dam, which had reached 1,717 feet. As of Monday, River Ravi at Kot Naina was discharging 64,000 cusecs and may cause "low to medium" floods at Jassar within 24 hours, with the potential to escalate to high flood levels if additional spillway releases occurred along with continued rainfall activity till August 27.

In light of possible flooding, the PDMA issued instructions to the district administrations concerned to remain alert, while an alert had also been issued to the commissioners of Lahore, Sahiwal, Multan, Bahawalpur and D.G. Khan. The deputy commissioners of Kasur, Okara, Pakpattan, Vehari, Bahawalnagar, Lodhran, Bahawalpur, Multan and Muzaffargarh were also put on alert in light of floods.

Meanwhile, the PDMA issued a fact sheet on the monsoon flood situation, including statistics on rains, rivers, dams, and the flood situa-

tion. In the last 24 hours, Narowal 27mm, Sialkot 5mm, Kasur 4mm, Lahore and Gujranwala 3mm, while Gujrat and Khanewal recorded up to 1mm of rain.

GB awaits help

Residents in several tehsils of Ghizer remained isolated for the fourth day due to the blockaded Gilgit-Shandur Road — a five-kilometre section of the artery had been submerged in last week's glacial flood that created an artificial lake in Raushan village in Ghizer.

Mohammad Karim, a resident, said 300 houses damaged by the flash flood had been submerged by the lake, and villagers in Hakis, Thangi, and Raushan remained without basic necessities. The locals complained that they had been uprooted from their homes, but still did not get any relief from the government. The people were living without electricity, potable water, housing, medical facilities and other basic needs, Mr Karim said.

Furthermore, the flood-affected people in Ghizer's Khalti, Daen, Chaturkhand, and other areas also did not have access to roads and basic facilities.

For the almost a month, the residents of remote Hisper Valley in Nagar had been marooned after the road was washed away by floods and landslides. Similarly, the Karakoram Highway near Hassanabad in Hunza remained blocked for the third week and traffic was diverted via an alternative route. The Haramosh and Bagrot valleys in Gilgit were also without road access, causing hardships.

A resident Shahzad Hussain told Dawn that

the densely packed areas of Danyor, Sultanabad, and Mohammadabad in Gilgit did not have any water supply for more than a month, leading to a severe shortage of water. Locals said the residents had to purchase tankers daily, which the poor could not afford.

Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GBDMA) Director General Zakir Hussain, in a statement, said the National Highway Authority's machinery had been mobilised to clear the Shandur road. He further said that a formal approval had also been obtained for the construction of an alternative route, and work was progressing rapidly. "Under the project, a bypass will be constructed and the road will be connected to the main highway through a bridge..." he added.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was expected to arrive in GB on Wednesday. According to a statement, a high-level meeting was chaired by GB Chief Secretary Abrar Ahmed Mirza to review the arrangements for the expected visit.

In a separate event at the PM's House in Islamabad, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to the three local shepherds of Gilgit-Baltistan, who saved hundreds of lives in a nearby village by issuing a timely alert about a glacial lake outburst flood (Glof). The PM met Wasyiat Khan, Insaar and Muhammad Khan, and presented them each a cheque worth Rs2.5 million as a reward for their humanitarian act.

Aamir Yasin in Rawalpindi and Syed Irfan Raza in Islamabad also contributed to this report

Serving Maj Gen appointed to interior ministry

Appointment comes a month after Naqvi signalled intention to hire serving officer for effective coordination between civil armed forces and military

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: The government on Monday appointed a serving army major general to the key post of additional secretary in the interior ministry — a position traditionally held by senior civil bureaucrats.

A notification issued by the Establishment Division stated: "Major General Noor Wali Khan, HI (M), is transferred and posted as Additional Secretary (BS-21), Interior and Narcotics Control Division, on secondment basis for a period of three years, with immediate effect and until fur-

ther orders."

The notification has been circulated to the Prime Minister's Office, President Secretariat, Cabinet Division, Establishment Division, interior ministry, defence ministry, and other relevant departments.

In July, Minister Naqvi had signalled his intention to induct a serving army officer into the interior ministry, citing the need for effective coordination between civil armed forces — which report to the ministry — and the military in counterterrorism operations.

The paramilitary and civil armed forces under the ministry's administrative control include the Frontier Corps, Rangers, Pakistan Coast Guards, Gilgit-Baltistan Scouts, and the newly-established Federal Constabulary. All of them are actively engaged in counterterrorism and counter-insurgency operations across the country.

Sources said that Maj Gen Khan has previously held key military and intelligence assignments.

His predecessor, Sohail Habib Tajik — a BS-21 officer of the Police

Service of Pakistan (PSP) — has been relieved of his responsibilities and directed to report to the Establishment Division, without being assigned any new portfolio.

A parallel notification read: "Sohail Habib Tajik, presently serving as Additional Secretary Interior and Narcotics Control Division, on deputation basis, is transferred and directed to report to Establishment Division, with immediate effect and until further orders."

Tajik had been serving as Additional Secretary Administration, while Nazar Mohammad Buzdar holds the post of Additional Secretary Internal and Foreigners Security, and Salman Chaudhry is serving as Additional Secretary Border Management.

Mr Tajik, a senior PSP officer, has not been given any portfolio following his posting from the prime post of the Ministry of Interior.

Following the induction of Maj Gen Khan, sources said, further reshuffling within the ministry is expected.

PM suspends 8 NHA officials, orders probe into irregularities in CAREC

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- Panel formed to investigate corruption, ghost tendering, collusive practices in award of contracts
- Joint venture awarded contract despite past disqualification for non-performance
- Senate committee gives NHA two days to provide documents or face contract cancellation

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has suspended eight senior officials of the National Highway Authority (NHA) and formed a high level inquiry committee to probe into glaring irregularities, mala fide intension, ghost tendering, collusive practices and alleged corrupt practices in award of Rs170 billion international road project under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Tranche-III.

Meanwhile, the Senate Standing Committee on Economic Affairs Division (EAD), in its meeting on Monday, gave a two-day deadline to the NHA to clarify its position through documentary evidences demonstrating transparency in the award of the contract. Failing that, the committee recommended cancellation of the contract and disqualification of the successful joint venture (JV).

The committee questioned how the PM's inquiry committee would reach a decision, given that the NHA had failed to provide relevant documents to the Senate committee for the past four months.

The case is already under investigation by five parliamentary committees—from both the Senate and the National Assembly—as well as the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA). All have identified serious violations of rules and corrupt practices in awarding the four lots of the CAREC Tranche-III project, which is being funded by the Asian Development Bank.

A notification from the PM Office available with *Dawn*, which was also presented before the standing committee on Monday, revealed that nine NHA officials were suspended. Those suspended include member engineering Asim Amin, member Imtiaz Ahmed Khokhar, Muhammad Talha, director engineering, and four officials of the procurement department. A recently

retired member Samiur Rehman is also facing the inquiry.

The document said: "In pursuance of Prime Minister's Office U.O No. 2(90)/DS(EA-I)/2025 dated 21-08-2025, the prime minister has been pleased to constitute the following committee on the above subject (to review award of contract of CAREC-Tranche-III Project)."

The inquiry committee includes retired federal secretary Muhammad Mushtaq Ahmed (convener); Commerce Division secretary; retired NHA member Mukhtar Ahmed Durrani; retired chief engineer Akbar Ali and the member Planning Commission.

The terms of reference of the inquiry committee are: (a) review NHA's current practices related to blacklisting contractors; (b) examine whether NHA undertook due diligence during the opening of technical bids of CAREC Tranche-III project; (c) assess whether NHA conducted the grievance redressal in the instant process in a transpar-

ent and judicious manner; (d) evaluate all stages in award of project so far to ascertain unnecessary delays, if any; (e) suggest way forward on the current process; (f) review any other matter ancillary to the above.

The document further said the committee shall submit a comprehensive report with actionable recommendations to PM Office within one week. The Ministry of Communications shall act as secretariat to the committee.

Interestingly, the contract for the four lots of CAREC Tranche-III was awarded to a JV of NXCC, Dynamics Constructors, and Rustam Associates, despite this JV being disqualified two years ago by the NHA for failing to complete a previous CAREC project on time.

The parliamentary committees have given ample time to the NHA to provide relevant documents to substantiate the eligibility, financial and technical soundness of the JV firms and no violation to PPRA, and even NHA's rules, in the award

of the contract, but the authority remained failed to provide such documents and bent upon confusing the lawmakers and senior officials of different ministries and PPRA.

CAREC Tranche-I, II, and III projects are in various stages of completion. Tranche-III consists of four road segments: Lot-1 (is 58km road from Rajanpur to Jampur), Lot-2 (64km from Jampur to D.G. Khan), Lot-3 (112km from D.G. Khan to Tibbi Qaisrani), and Lot-4 (96km from Tibbi Qaisrani to D.I. Khan).

In the previous meeting of the Senate committee on EAD, held on Aug 2, the NHA was given a final 15-day deadline to come up with all documents required by the committee. However, even after the deadline the NHA could not present the relevant documents in the committee's meeting on Monday.

NHA Chairman Sheharyar Sultan apprised the committee that responses to certain questions were still awaited from the relevant firms and departments, while some infor-

mation had already been submitted to the Ministry of Communications.

'Very serious matter'

Senator Kamil Ali Agha termed the suspension of officers on a large scale a "very serious matter" and demanded clarity. The committee was of the view that the charge sheet against the officers must have been attached with the notifications issued by the Cabinet Division and the PM Office.

Turning to the Shandoor-Gilgit road project (under CAREC Tranche-I), Senator Saifullah Abro said: "You people cannot even defend this project." He said the contract had been awarded in Dec 2021 and Feb 2022. He expressed shock that the same firm—Ningxia Communications Construction Company—which had been disqualified from ADB's CAREC Tranche-II (Shikarpur-Rajanpur) project and Yarik-Zhob project for submitting fake documents and forged seal stamps, was awarded the Shandoor-Gilgit project.

'Early monsoon extreme heat behind widespread devastation'

By Bakhtawar Mian

ISLAMABAD: A climate expert said on Monday that Pakistan's monsoon set in around July 1 this year, two weeks earlier than usual and parts of the country experienced above-normal rainfall and searing heat that hastened glacial melt and unleashed glacial lake outburst floods (Glofs).

"This year, monsoon onset was early from July 1 instead of July 15," said Dr Shehzada Adnan, a senior meteorologist, at a virtual roundtable hosted by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI).

'Depressions from the Bay of Bengal converged over both northern and southern regions, while westerly systems shifted unusually far north,' he explained.

Rainfall was 13 per cent above the seasonal norm in north-eastern Punjab and Kashmir, he added, while temperatures rose by as much as 6.7C, accelerating glacier melt and triggering Glofs.

Due to poor storage capacity in major river catchments, Mr Adnan said flooding in eastern rivers continues to devastate farmland.

However, it is worth mentioning that the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) began reporting monsoon-related fatalities in late June, indicating that the season's effective onset had occurred even earlier.

The roundtable — Unprecedented Monsoon Impacts in Pakistan: Climate Extremes and Humanitarian Challenges — drew together researchers, humanitarian and policy specialists as the country faced what several participants called a climate-induced crisis.

A devastating monsoon season marked by record rainfall, glacier melt and wide-

spread flooding has exposed Pakistan's extreme vulnerability to climate change, they said, demanding urgent investment in climate-resilient plans to preempt future disasters.

"Pakistan contributes less than one percent of global emissions but remains among the world's top 10 most climate-vulnerable countries," said Dr Shafqat Munir, Deputy Executive Director at SDPI. "This is no longer just a natural hazard — it is a climate-induced humanitarian crisis."

Mr Munir highlighted that the NDMA has presented 2025 contingency plans for four risk scenarios: heavy inflows merging into the Indus from mountain rains, flash floods in northern mountains, urban flooding in Karachi, and glacier melt; three have already occurred this season.

Experts stressed that a key failure is the public's behavioural response.

"Pakistan's greatest weakness was lack of preparedness and community drills," said Dr Sofia Khalid, Chairperson of the Department of Environmental Sciences at Allama Iqbal Open University. "Despite repeated warnings from NDMA, people often ignore alerts. Our behavioural response remains reactive."

"Communities in flood-prone areas must be trained on safe evacuation points, emergency contacts, and disaster drills. Preparedness can save lives," she added.

The humanitarian fallout from these disasters disproportionately harms the most vulnerable, another speaker highlighted.

"Floods and climatic shocks disproportionately affect women, children, and minorities," said Dr Andaleeb Koasar Jhatial, a lecturer at the International Islamic University Islamabad.

India shared flood warning bypassing IWT, FO confirms

- Spokesperson says New Delhi relayed warning via ‘diplomatic channels’ • Pakistan notified of high flood in held Jammu’s Tawi River that flows into Chenab

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: After India shared a flood warning with Pakistan via diplomatic channels instead of under the Indus Waters Treaty, Islamabad took exception to the move and asked New Delhi to comply with the treaty.

The development was shared by the Foreign Office in a statement on Monday. FO Spokesperson Shahfqat Ali Khan said: “On August 24, 2025, India communicated flood warnings through diplomatic channels, rather than through the IWC as required under the IWT.”

Under paragraph 8 of Article IV of the IWT, “each party agrees to communicate to the other party, as far in advance as practicable, any information it may have in regard to such extraordinary discharges of water from reservoirs and flood flows as may affect the other party”.

“We reaffirm that India is obligated to fully comply with all provisions of the treaty. India’s unilateral declaration to hold the treaty in abeyance constitutes a serious violation of international law and could have significant negative consequences for peace and stability in South Asia,” Dawn.com reported.

It reported that a communiqué on Sunday from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad notified the government of a high flood in Jammu’s Tawi River that flows into the Chenab River. At present, Chenab is at risk of high to very high flooding amid torrential rainfall across Punjab.

Under paragraph 8 of Article IV of the

IWT, “each party agrees to communicate to the other party, as far in advance as practicable, any information it may have in regard to such extraordinary discharges of water from reservoirs and flood flows as may affect the other party”.

An Indian government source told Reuters on Monday that New Delhi had shared the warning on possible cross-border flooding on “humanitarian grounds” and not under the IWT. The Indian High Commission in Islamabad shared the warning following heavy rains in occupied Kashmir, the source said.

India in April held the IWT in abeyance following the attack in occupied Kashmir’s Pahalgam that killed 26 — an incident New Delhi blamed on Islamabad without evidence. Pakistan termed any attempt to suspend its water share an “act of war”, noting the IWT had no provision for unilateral suspension.

In June, Pakistan welcomed the decision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague to issue a “Supplemental Award of Competence” in the Indus Waters case, stating that India cannot unilaterally hold the treaty in abeyance. According to the statement by the PCA, the court found that it was not open to India to unilaterally suspend the IWT or hold it in abeyance.

“The Court first considered the terms of the Treaty (IWT), which do not provide for the unilateral ‘abeyance’ or ‘suspension’ of the treaty; rather, according to its terms, the treaty continues in force until terminated with the mutual consent of India and Pakistan,” the press release read.

Ex-Servicemen Page 9 regret delay in revision of retired soldiers' pension

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Ex-Servicemen Society (PESS) on Monday expressed deep regret over the government's continued neglect in revising the basic pension of retired soldiers, war veterans, and families of martyrs.

During a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Society, chaired by retired Lt General Abdul Qayyum Malik, it was pointed out that many old pensioners receive no more than Rs12,000 per month, while widows get as little as Rs9,000 — amounts grossly inadequate even for basic subsistence.

The PESS urged the government to end this long-standing injustice by revising pensions at least to the level of the minimum wage (Rs37,000), ensuring financial dignity and security for those who sacrificed for the nation.

The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdul Aleem, Air Marshal Pervaiz Nawaz, Lt Gen M. Afzal, Brig Tariq SJ, Brig Zafar along with other officers, JCOs, and PESS supporting staff.

The meeting condemned India's continued involvement in fuelling insurgency and sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan's western provinces.

Pakistan, Morocco discuss visa facilitation, bilateral cooperation

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan-Morocco Parliamentary Friendship Group on Monday pledged to deepen bilateral cooperation through regular people-to-people connectivity and exchange of visits.

A meeting of the Group was held at the Parliament House. Senator Bilal Ahmed Khan chaired the meeting. Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco, Mr Mohamed Karmoune, along with senior Moroccan officials and members of the Senate, attended the meeting.

In his opening remarks, Senator Bilal underscored the importance of foster-



CONVENER Pakistan-Morocco Parliamentary Friendship Group in the Senate Senator Bilal Ahmed Khan, holds a meeting with Moroccan Ambassador to Pakistan Mohamed Karmoune at the Parliament House on Monday.—APP

ing closer parliamentary, economic and diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Karmoune reaffirmed Morocco's commitment to advancing bilateral relations with Pakistan. He stressed the importance of balancing trade by

encouraging greater imports from Pakistan.

During the meeting, challenges faced by Moroccan nationals in obtaining Pakistani visas were also discussed. Ambassador Karmoune added that Morocco has already extended the

facility of e-visa for Pakistani citizens and requested reciprocal facilitation to ease the process for Moroccan applicants.

Both sides expressed mutual interest in expanding cooperation in key sectors such as education, health, trade, and

agriculture.

The group emphasised that regular parliamentary exchanges can serve as a strong foundation for long-term collaboration and people-to-people connectivity.

Supporting these views, Ms Misbah Khar highlighted the need for institutional collaboration within bilateral and constitutional policy frameworks. She also identified trade, tourism, and cultural exchange as key areas for building a long-term partnership.

Senator Faisal Saleem Rahman identified several promising areas for future collaboration, including education, medical equipment, sports, tourism, and defence training.

He emphasised that a bilateral agreement should be established

between Pakistan and Morocco to promote tourism. He also stated that scholarships should be awarded to Students in Pakistan on a province-wise basis.

The meeting concluded with both sides reaffirming their commitment to further deepen Pakistan-Morocco relations through sustained parliamentary diplomacy and enhanced institutional cooperation.

Members underscored that continued dialogue, regular exchanges and practical initiatives will catalyse fostering stronger bilateral ties and greater people-to-people connectivity.

Those who attended the meeting included Senators Faisal Saleem Rahman, Mir Dostian Khan Domki, Umer Farooq and Advisor to the Chairman Senate, Ms Misbah Khar.

Washington plays supportive role in Pakistan's education sector: USEFP head

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By Kashif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: The United States of America is Pakistan's oldest friend and has consistently played a supportive role in the country's education sector.

This was stated by the newly-appointed Executive Director of the United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan (USEFP), Dr Peter K. Moran.

Dr Moran assumed office in April 2025, a year that marks a significant milestone in the Foundation's journey, as it celebrates 75 years of fostering educational and cultural exchange between the two countries.

Speaking to *Dawn*, he said there are lots of opportunities for Pakistani students to study in best American universities through scholarship and exchange programmes.

Dr Moran, an education professional and cultural anthropologist, said Fulbright was a flagship programme and Pakistani students were one of its major beneficiaries in the



EXECUTIVE Director of the United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan Dr Peter K. Moran.—Photo by Tanveer Shahzad

world.

"Our relations with Pakistan are very old. We are working here since 1950," he said.

"There is no denying of benefit of technology, as because of technology now world is connected with each others. But the beauty of Fullbright Program provides face to face learning opportunity to Pakistani stu-

dents to get study in our best universities," he said and added that people-to-people connectivity helped people learning more.

Talking about impact of the programme, he said US had a large alumni network in Pakistan and they were serving at various positions, helping their country to make progress,

which was indeed a matter of pride for the US.

"Many top professionals, lawmakers, academician etc are Fullbright scholars and they are contributing for betterment of Pakistan," Dr Moran said and added that USEFP ensured transparency in the award of scholarships.

"We have a very competitive system in place. Fullbright is not a lottery; candidates have to face tough competition. We select best of the best so that they could excel while studying in USA." He said despite this tough criteria, every year a large number of students qualify for the scholarship, as "Pakistanis are very competitive...incredible," he said.

Dr Moran, who has 30 years of experience in field of education, said USEFP provides equal opportunities to everyone. He also stated that Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program also great for mid-career professionals as under this (for 10-12 month) fellows get education in USA for a graduate level non-

degree academic coursework. They also take part in professional development activities.

"We want to assist Pakistanis [through our programmes] in making their dreams [getting education in USA] come true. So I will advise students to set their targets of getting these scholarships," he said.

It is relevant to note here that in April this year, the US government closed an undergraduate exchange programme after which there were reports that other programmes could also face closure. However, Dr Moran clarified: "Sometime accurate information is not available. Let me just say our flagship programmes are continued." Besides the talent of Pakistani students, Dr Moran is also very impressed with the beauty of Pakistan's capital city. He said Islamabad's beauty has been mesmerizing him. "I am enjoying working in this beautiful city," he said.

He is also fond of Pakistani mangos. "Varieties of all mangos are very good and I like chaunsa very much," he said.

Hospitals' employees blame minister for turning down salary-hike request

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: Staff of hospitals in the capital criticised Health Minister Mustafa Kamal on Monday after he allegedly told doctors to close hospitals because he could not play a role in their salary increases.

On Monday, a delegation of the Federal Health Alliance (FHA), led by Chaudhry Qamar Gujjar, visited the ministry to discuss salary concerns. When they attempted to address the issue with Mustafa Kamal, the minister reportedly said he could do nothing, telling them, "Go and close the hospitals."

Employees expressed disappointment that the minister did not acknowledge their efforts working in hospitals without substantial salary hikes.

They highlighted that while parliamentarians received salary increases, medical staff were still deprived of even a health allowance.

FHA Chairman Kaleemullah has scheduled a meeting on August 28 to formulate a strategy following the health minister's comments.

The employees warned that if protests or hospital closures occur, the health minister will be held responsible.

When contacted, the media coordinator of the health ministry

stated that the accusation was unfounded.

"It was the health minister who listened to the issue of employees [after the passage of the budget] and endorsed that a summary should be moved to the Ministry of Finance for salary increase. He himself took an interest in the increase in salaries and asked about the development many times. Employees may have a misunderstanding," he explained.

It is worth mentioning that, after the passage of the financial budget, health professionals rejected the budget and announced to close the hospital, but the federal health minister intervened and a request was made to the finance minister to increase salaries for health staff, but the request was ultimately denied by the finance ministry.

Meanwhile, Mustafa Kamal visited the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap) to oversee the newly-launched online registration and licensing system for medical devices.

The CEO further said the prime minister inaugurated the system on July 21, 2025.

Since its launch, a total of 940 applications have been received, including 610 registration applications, 53 post registration variations, 75 product renewals, 31 new licensing applications, seven post

licensing variations, and 22 license renewals.

From these, 188 applications have already been approved with Digital Letters issued to the companies, while the rest are in process and will be completed within the designated timelines.

The minister was told that the system was continually evolving, with parameters on the Management Dashboard increasing from 10 to 23 within just one month, allowing for improved oversight and more effective regulatory management.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister stated: "The digitisation of the medical devices system has not only facilitated ease of doing business, but also has promoted domestic and foreign investment, and enabled the growth of the local industry."

"Digitisation has improved medical standards in the country, assured the timely and easy availability of quality medical devices across Pakistan, and increased global confidence in Pakistan's medical devices regulatory framework," he added.

Before this initiative, obtaining a license for medical devices took 18 to 24 months, creating unnecessary hurdles for entrepreneurs. With the fully digital system, licenses are now issued within 20 days.

PMDC shares detail of medical college with NAB

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ISLAMABAD: After getting a letter from the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) has shared details of the College of Medicine and Dentistry at the Hills, Abbottabad.

According to NAB documents available with Dawn, PMDC was directed to share the procedure for registering a new medical college, a list of documents required for registration, confirmation of the procedural steps followed by PMDC during the inspection and recognition of the College of Medicine and Dentistry at the Hills, Abbottabad.

Copies of applications, ownership structure records, certificates and other relevant documents submitted by the college for registration purposes, dates and details of inspections conducted for initial and renewal recognition, names and affiliations of inspection team members assigned to the college, complete inspection reports including photographs, resource checklist and hospital capacity verification were also sought.

NAB had also asked for the names and designations of the executive committee members involved in the college's review or approval process.

Similarly, all correspondence between PMDC and the college administration, including emails, letters and notices, were sought.

The reply submitted by PMDC, available with Dawn, showed that the inspection of the college was conducted by the president PMDC. The list of members of the executive committee was also provided, but the approval process has not been initiated.

However, the reply and documents showed that the inspection had been conducted on May 29, and 30, 2025, on the directions of the Islamabad High Court, but the college is yet to be recognised.

A senior official of the PMDC, wishing not to be quoted, said it was strange that NAB had started an investigation against a private medical college which had not been recognised, had not got a licence and not started admissions.

— Staff Reporter

Illegal felling of rare trees devastates Jand's forests

By Our Correspondent

TAXILA: The official forest reserve in Jand's Jalwal area is facing unprecedented destruction as rare and environment-friendly trees, including phulai, are being felled indiscriminately, allegedly in connivance with local timber mafia and criminal negligence of the forest department.

Locals say the ruthless cutting of trees has turned once lush government-owned jungles into barren lands, directly contributing to environmental degradation, increased soil erosion, and the heightened risk of flash floods that have already wreaked havoc in parts of Jand this season.

"This isn't just about timber theft, it's about stealing the air our children breathe," said Mohammad Ramzan, a resident of Jalwal.

"The government talks about tree-plantation drives while its own forests are being butchered under official noses."

Environmentalists warn that the removal of these natural barriers has left the area more prone to climate disasters.

Despite repeated complaints by locals, there has been no visible action by the Forest Department.

Officials claimed they were "monitoring the situation," but provided no details of any arrests or crackdowns.

The destruction of Jalwal's forests underscores a broader issue of weak enforcement and corruption in forest management across Punjab. While billions are spent annually on tree-planting campaigns, government-owned forests continue to disappear in silence.

When contacted, range officer Jand Ijaz Khan said that due to paucity of staff and resources, tree could not be protected from locals as they carried out their illegal activity at midnight.

He said that if anyone held red handed, he is punished as per law. Residents have appealed to Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif and Secretary Forests to take immediate notice and hold those responsible accountable.

Saudi low-cost carrier expands operation to Pakistan

By Mohammad Asghar

RAWALPINDI: Flyadeal, the Saudi low-cost carrier, has expanded its operations to Pakistan with inaugural flights landing in Islamabad and Peshawar.

A spokesman for Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) said that Flyadeal's inaugural flight FAD 651/652 arrived at Islamabad International Airport and was accorded traditional water salute upon arrival on Sunday.

The aircraft from Riyadh landed ahead of schedule at 06:08 AM hours with 65 passengers on board and was accorded a traditional water salute. The return flight departed at 07:33 a.m, carrying 172 passengers. Flyadeal will continue to operate a weekly flight between Riyadh and Islamabad every Sunday.

At Bacha Khan International Airport (BKIA), Peshawar on Monday, the inaugural flight was welcomed with a cake-cutting ceremony organised by Menzies RAS at the International Departure Lounge in front of the CIP Lounge.

The event, held from 5:05-5:25 AM, was attended by officials of the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA), Airport Security Force (ASF), and Menzies RAS. Flyadeal will now operate two weekly flights from Riyadh to Peshawar every Monday and Wednesday.

The Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) welcomed Flyadeal's entry into Pakistan's aviation market, noting that the new services to Peshawar and Islamabad will strengthen connectivity, facilitate passenger convenience, and further boost ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

40 UCs in Gwadar, Lasbela finalise development plans

By Our Staff Correspondent

QUETTA: Forty union councils in Gwadar and Lasbela districts have prepared their development plans (UCDPs), which have been formally handed over to the provincial government by the Gwadar Lasbela Livelihoods Support Project (GLLSP-II) jointly financed by the government and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The five-year UCDPs were developed through extensive consultations with communities, government line departments, and private sector partners. They outline targeted actions to address local development priorities, mobilise community resources, and strengthen self-reliance.

The Local Government and Rural Development Department and the Policy and Development Department will lead implementation and monitoring.

Local Government Department Secretary Abdul Rauf Baloch praised IFAD and the GLLSP-II team for their technical and financial support. "These plans will serve as a roadmap for inclusive rural development, responding directly to the needs identified by communities," he said. He added that the government would ensure resource allocation for execution and stressed that such plans should be developed for all rural union councils in the province.

Fernanda Thomaz da Rocha, IFAD Country Director for Pakistan, called the initiative "a major step showing what can be achieved when communities and government come together with a shared vision for their future". She said it reflects IFAD's mission of amplifying rural voices in decision-making and equipping communities with tools to build lasting opportunities. She said that in Balochistan, GLLSP-II is proving that community-driven development can create both resilience and hope for generations.

Sports and Youth Affairs Secretary Durra Baloch said: "I have been part of various provincial policy processes, but these plans stand out as a community-driven achievement that aligns development actions with local needs."

Asif Lehri, programme specialist, said the GLLSP-II, with technical assistance from the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), works to reduce poverty by strengthening livelihoods through grassroots planning and local governance. He said the demand-driven UCDPs not only address community priorities but also mobilise local resources to build long-term resilience. He noted that this is the first time in Balochistan's history that government and public stakeholders have jointly participated in community-driven planning and execution of rural development.

The second phase of GLLSP-II is a six-year programme benefiting more than 100,000 households across 40 union councils of Gwadar and Lasbela.

Omar Ayub Page 5 Shibli

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national and provincial assemblies convicted in Rana Sanaullah's house attack case will automatically be disqualified under Article 63 of the Constitution.

Reacting to the court decision, PTI Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram called it "nothing more than brazen political victimisation", aimed at muzzling the voices of PTI leaders, workers and supporters. He said they had committed no crime, yet they were being punished "solely for standing firmly against unconstitutional measures, the trampling of laws, gross human rights violations, the paralysis of state institutions, and the suppression of free speech".

On July 31, the Faisalabad court convicted over 100 PTI leaders and workers in three similar cases registered by different police stations.

PTI legal team head Malik Khalid Shafiq told *Dawn* that 17 of the PTI leaders were sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment on July 31 in the three similar cases registered under same sections. He argued that the ATC violated Section 403 of the CrPC and Article 13 of Constitution, which did not allow double conviction for same offence, pointing out that he had moved an application in this regard.

Vowing to move Lahore High Court against the convictions, Advocate Shafiq said there was no evidence against any convict, claiming that it was either Rana Sanaullah's ego or simply government's directions to get the PTI parliamentarians disqualified that "illegal sentences" were being awarded.

Also, the PTI denounced the "political victimisation", declaring that the party would relentlessly continue its struggle for rule of law, constitutional supremacy, and genuine democracy — come what may.

Zartaj Gul, Omar Ayub react

In separate posts on X, Zartaj Gul and Omar Ayub claimed they were innocent, following the court verdict.

Gul contended that the verdict was based on the argument that she was present in a Zaman Park meeting on May 7, 2023, where protest plans were reportedly made, but she was in her Dera Ghazi Khan constituency on that day, "attending a fateha, inauguration, wedding and other events".

Ayub said he was never there outside Sanaullah's house and the prosecution witnesses had not named him. "In addition, these prosecution witnesses' testimony was rejected by ATC Sargodha last year. These prosecution witnesses were branded as liars by the ATC Sargodha judge. This brings the total jail sentences against me to 40 years."

PTI plagued by uncertainty over by-elections

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push to reclaim political space in Punjab, and a showdown between two opposing camps within the party — it seems as if the PTI may throw its hat in the ring, despite all misgivings about the by-elections. According to sources privy to proceedings, Monday's meeting of the political committee voted 12-9 in favour of fielding candidates for the upcoming by-elections.

Additionally, PTI Information Secretary Sheikh Waqqas Akram announced that all candidates would be issued tickets under the banner of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), which appears to be an insurance policy of sorts, to offset chances of them being declared 'independent candidates', since the dispute around PTI's intra-party elections and the matter of its electoral symbol are still in limbo.

Three meetings with Imran

Aleema Khan had clearly stated after meeting with the former prime minister that Mr Khan did not want to field any candidates for the by-elections. If they did, it would appear to be an insult, disrespecting and dishonouring leaders who had been disqualified. This message was also shared Mr Khan's official X account — even though the former PM does not personally have access to social media.

However, a majority of the party leaders were in favour of contesting

by-elections. So, Mr Khan was approached once again through his sisters, and he repeated the same message, sources said.

But, in the last meeting between Imran and his legal team, Naeem Haider Panjota called up Advocate Ali Bukhari — another member of the legal team — saying that Mr Khan wanted to meet him.

According to one account, it was Mr Bukhari who prevailed on the party founder to reconsider his stance, saying that in case any legislators from KP are disqualified in the coming days and the PTI does not field any candidates, it may stand to lose its majority in KP. Observers feel that while the PTI is under a lot of pressure in Punjab, there is no looming threat to the party in KP, partly because only a handful of the sitting or former MPAs have been nominated in cases where they may face disqualification.

In addition, the provincial government-appointed prosecutors are less inclined to push these cases in courts, which are widely seen as being comparatively lenient towards the party.

This is also a reason why many parliamentarians, who are facing prosecution in Punjab, have either taken up sanctuary in KP or approached the Peshawar High Court for legal relief.

Mr Bukhari reportedly also asked Mr Khan about fielding candidates for the vacant posts of opposition leaders in the National Assembly and Senate, and the

Punjab Assembly. This issue, the founder had instructed, should be discussed by the political committee, and suggested that if candidates are to be fielded, Mahmood Khan Achakzai and Azam Swati should be considered.

Drama in political committee

During Monday's meeting, it emerged that a majority of leaders were in favour of not ceding political space to the ruling parties.

A fear was expressed that PTI legislators from KP could be disqualified in Nov 26 cases, after which the party may not be able to hold on to the provincial government. Once the KP government goes, things will become more difficult for the party, sources said.

In addition, PTI leaders were confident that they could easily win elections in KP. However, when Sheikh Waqqas Akram shared the party's decision on social media, it triggered a wave of criticism from across the globe. When approached, Mr Akram confirmed that he, Salman Akram Raja and a few others were against the decision, but they had to go with the majority.

In a dramatic turn of events, however, Salman Akram Raja tweeted his intention to step down from the post of secretary general, saying he would request Imran Khan to accept his resignation when the two met on Tuesday (today).

Although he did not specify what prompted him to take this decision, the timing of his tweet indicated that the

"incident" he referred to was — in all probability — the political committee's decision to contest by-polls. "Tomorrow I will resign from my position by requesting Khan sahib. My legal services will remain available without compensation," he wrote on X.

Talking to *Dawn*, former Punjab Assembly opposition leader Malik Ahmad Khan Bhachar said that the fog around whether to contest by-elections or not would be cleared up when lawyers meet Imran Khan in Adiala Jail today (Tuesday). He also voiced support for elements who feel that the party should not leave the field open in Punjab by boycotting polls. "While going into elections on around 14 provincial and national assembly constituencies, the PTI will be doing a lot of political activity, which would definitely expose the government if it tried to rig these elections," he said.

Candidates withdraw

Meanwhile, three PPP candidates have withdrawn their nomination papers for by-elections in Punjab, in favour of PML-N nominees, as per a recent agreement between the two parties. A PPP spokesperson said that candidates had withdrawn their candidatures for National Assembly constituencies NA-129 (Lahore) and NA-66 (Wazirabad), as well as the Punjab Assembly constituency PP-87 (Mianwali).

Amjad Mahmood in Lahore also contributed to this report

SECP rejects auditor's findings of unlawful pay, perks

Challenges AGP's authority to conduct financial scrutiny

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) on Monday challenged the Auditor General of Pakistan's (AGP) audit report 2024-25, which alleged that pay and allowance increases for its senior management were made unlawfully and without due process.

In challenging the report, the commission also claimed that the auditor general's office lacked the authority required to conduct the financial scrutiny.

The move by the SECP follows similar pushback against the auditor general from the Pakistan Telecommunication Company Ltd and the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority.

The audit objections noted the salary and perks of the SECP chairman and commissioners were raised for the two previous fiscal years. The report also mentioned that the SECP failed to

deposit revenues and surplus balances into the Federal Consolidated Fund.

In a statement, the SECP maintained it was a "statutory body with administrative, financial, and functional independence," as provided under the SECP Act of 1997 and international standards for capital market regulators.

"All decisions and actions cited above, by the Commission, have been taken strictly in accordance with the SECP Act, 1997, and with the due approval of the competent authority," the SECP said.

The commission argued the audit report is preliminary and will be reviewed by the Departmental Accounts Committee (DAC), where its position will be formally presented.

"The report is currently based on observations only and it will be taken up at the DAC level, where opinions from both AGP and SECP will be sought before concluding on the matter," the statement said.

The SECP said similar observations raised by the AGP in the past were settled in its favour by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in July 2025.

"It is regrettable that despite the decision, the issue has been raised again without seeking the opinion from Finance or Law Ministry," the SECP said, expressing confidence that the matter would be settled based on the existing precedent.

The commission stated that its Policy Board, which includes secretaries from the finance, commerce and law divisions, the deputy governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, and private sector experts, has final approval of all budgetary decisions.

To attract and retain professionals with "exceptional expertise and integrity," the SECP said it periodically reviews remuneration packages with the Policy Board's approval, using market surveys to ensure competitiveness.

The SECP also expressed dismay at what it called "imbalanced reporting" in the media, stating that its responses included in the audit report were not shared publicly. It also said a claim that it did not respond to a DAC meeting invitation was "factually incorrect," as no such invitation was received.

—Staff Reporter

CM vows to defend people's rights at NFC meeting

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has said that a joint stand will be taken through consultations with all parliamentary and other political parties to defend rights of the people of Balochistan in the National Finance Commission meeting.

The NFC meeting will be held on August 29. The meeting will be presided over by Federal Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb.

Speaking at a pre-NFC meeting on Monday, he said that the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award is an important opportunity for promoting harmony between a strong federation and provinces.

It was decided in the meeting that opinions of all political parties and experts will be included on the NFC Award.

On the occasion, Mr Bugti clarified that by expanding the scope of consultations, opinion would also be sought from those political parties which have no representation in the parliament so that the prov-

ince's position is strong, comprehensive and unanimous.

He said that the suggestions of economic and financial experts and experts from other fields would also be sought so that interests of the people of the province could be comprehensively defended in the NFC meeting.

The chief minister expressed the hope that expectations of the people of Balochistan would be included in the 11th National Finance Commission Award because the award would end backwardness of the province and ensure prosperity and progress of the province.

He said that fair distribution of resources of provinces and transparency are guarantors of development of provinces and a strong federation.

Provincial Finance Minister Mir Shoaib Noshewani briefed the meeting on the economic situation and financial needs of the province and highlighted various aspects of the upcoming National Finance Commission Award.

Ties that bind

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RELATIONS between Pakistan and Bangladesh, which had hit a low point during Sheikh Hasina Wajed's rule, are on the mend under the interim administration in Dhaka. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar recently wrapped up a trip to Bangladesh — the first time a Pakistani foreign minister has visited Dhaka in 13 years. He received a warm reception, with six "instruments" signed to bolster ties in various sectors, while Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Bangladesh's adviser on foreign affairs both expressed a wish to deepen relations. There was also talk of reviving Saarc, though both states differed on how to approach the tragic events of 1971. Dhaka insists on an apology for the violent upheaval that led to the break-up of united Pakistan as well as reparations, while Islamabad feels these questions have already been settled.

Sheikh Hasina's regime used the 1971 war to justify its hostile attitude towards Pakistan and warm ties with India. But there have been changes in Bangladesh since then. For example, after the ouster of the Awami League government last year, there have been violent attacks on statues and institutions linked to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman — once virtually deified as 'Bangabandhu' — and the interim set-up has removed his visage from Bangladeshi currency. These reactions have occurred largely because Sheikh Hasina's government had promoted a personality cult around Sheikh Mujib, and unleashed a ruthless crackdown on all opposition forces. Therefore, while both Islamabad and Dhaka should continue their discussions on how to approach the 1971 events, this issue should not become an obstacle to better ties, as both capitals have common grounds for friendship. In this context, there is merit in the Pakistani state's argument that differences over the separation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh have been addressed by Pakistan's 1974 recognition of Bangladesh, and Gen Pervez Musharraf's expression of "regret" during his 2002 visit for the excesses of 1971. There is indeed a need for all sides to come to terms with the tragedy of 1971, but this does not mean that Islamabad-Dhaka ties should remain forever hostile.

Meanwhile, while the suggestion to revive Saarc may be well-intentioned it is impractical at this point because of India's intransigence — even if it is worth a try. There is already a trilateral cooperation mechanism involving China, Pakistan and Bangladesh. This forum can be further explored to deepen ties between the three states, and other regional countries who wish to work together for progress can be invited to join. Pakistan and Bangladesh share a common history and culture, and despite the painful events of 1971, they can become partners in regional progress through trade and people-to-people ties. It is hoped that the next elected government in Dhaka will also work to improve ties.

Hedging risks

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FINANCE Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb's concerns regarding crypto assets and blockchain technology are quite discernible and not at all misplaced. It seems that, like a responsible steward, he wishes to make sure that the country's banking and financial sectors have sufficient safety nets installed before Pakistan steps into the age of digital alchemy. Mr Aurangzeb's cautious approach will invariably place him at odds with younger champions of cryptocurrencies and related technologies, many of whom would like to see the country 'seize the moment' without further ado. Nevertheless, it would be wise to act with restraint. Speaking at the 'Leadership Summit on Blockchain and Digital Assets: Technology and Innovation', Mr Aurangzeb expressed optimism about the promise of crypto technologies and their potential to improve lives. He noted that embracing blockchain could drive innovation, inclusion and transparency in the financial sector. At the same time, he underscored the importance of ensuring that any initiatives undertaken remain within a defined regulatory framework. He seemed particularly concerned about the potential risks from crypto adoption pertaining to know-your-customer and anti-money laundering regulations, sanctions and monitoring, which may reverse Pakistan's progress on the FATF front.

There is no doubt that interest exists in how Pakistan will decide to engage with crypto assets and related technologies. The interest is not only from Pakistanis, but also from powerful players among the global elite. It is, therefore, encouraging to note that there are mature voices keeping an eye on the country's interests while this topic is being discussed at the highest levels of decision-making. For others advising the government on crypto, the correct approach would be to follow the finance minister's lead. It is concerning that Bilal Bin Saqib, the youthful special assistant to the prime minister on blockchain and cryptocurrency, chose to skip the summit the finance minister had seen fit to attend in person. More so because he is expected to lead the conversation on crypto adoption. It is hoped that, in general, those appointed to assist the government in crypto-related matters are taking their assignments seriously. The involvement of powerful actors should not be a reason for them to take due diligence lightly. As Mr Aurangzeb pointed out, there is much at stake, and it is, therefore, necessary to proceed with utmost care and responsibility.

Squandered riches

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PAKISTAN's cultural wealth represents the country's huge untapped potential for tourism and diplomacy. An exhibition themed 'Respecting Diverse Civilisations, Pursuing Common Development', aligned with the upcoming summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, is set to open in Beijing. As one of the nine member states of the SCO, Pakistan has sent 10 artefacts spanning a range of historical eras — from Mehrgarh to Mohenjodaro and more. The objects include a female terracotta figurine from 3500-3000 BCE, a 2800-2700 BCE painted pot, a 1800-1600 BCE horse statue, a Buddha head, and a Jain ritual tank from 600-200 BCE. While the 5000 BCE steatite Indus seal is the most ancient relic, the third-fourth century BCE Apalala Jataka stone panel, with the Buddha ordering Naga Apalala to halt the overflowing Swat river, is perhaps the pièce de résistance.

Unfortunately, the idea of economic diversification by capitalising on a unique inheritance eludes Pakistan. Vast reserves of cultural assets have, over the years, been lost to smuggling, theft and the elements. Experts claim that the pillage can be attributed to a strong nexus between smuggling networks and influential quarters, ignorance among rural communities and tribal hostilities. Even museums in urban centres are in a shambles. It is time the ruling elite woke up to the gains from unlocking heritage and culture tourism through preservation, infrastructural investment — transport, tour guides, security, accommodation and other tourism services — marketing, security and international partnerships. This will inspire local communities, generate employment, help boost a sinking economy and open new diplomatic channels. We must not lose sight of the lethal consequences of unguarded, undocumented and underdeveloped vestiges — smuggling, which not only benefits racketeers but also funds terror outfits. The power of heritage and customs changes narratives, transforms society and promotes diversity and unity.



Like a fearless Rachel Corrie

FOUR Al Jazeera journalists, including globally admired correspondent Anas al-Sharif, were killed in Gaza in an Israeli air strike on Aug 10. Seeking to muffle the outrage, Israel sought to justify the targeted killing by claiming ingeniously that the murdered men were 'Hamas terrorists'. Solid evidence shows up the lie.

A tweet by Priyanka Gandhi the following day berated the Modi government's silence on the wider genocide of Palestinians underway with impunity in Gaza. "The Israeli state is committing genocide," Gandhi declared amidst a sea of silence. "It has murdered over 60,000 people, 18,430 of whom were children. It has starved hundreds to death including many children and is threatening to starve millions. Enabling these crimes by silence and inaction is a crime in itself. It is shameful that the Indian government stands silent as Israel unleashes this devastation on the people of Palestine." Nehru would be pleased with his great-granddaughter's sagacity and sense of camaraderie that he had institutionalised for new India.

Israel's ambassador responded impertinently to Gandhi's Nehruvian anger. Emboldened by his complicit right-wing Indian hosts, Ambassador Reuven Azar sneered at Priyanka as Hindutva groups applauded him. "What is shameful is your deceit," the ambassador railed before proceeding with his troll. "Israel killed 25,000 Hamas terrorists. The terrible cost in human lives derives from Hamas's heinous tactics of hiding behind civilians, their shooting of people trying to evacuate or receive assistance and their rocket fire."

Cut to Rachel Corrie who was seven years younger than Priyanka Gandhi when she died a valiant death at the young age of 24. Early in her short life, the American non-violent activist had become a member of the pro-Palestinian International Solidarity Movement, working in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories. On March 16, 2003, she was in Rafah, once a bustling city in the Gaza Strip, where the Israeli military was demolishing Palestinian houses during the Second Intifada. While protesting the demolitions as they were being carried out, Corrie was killed by an Israeli armoured bulldozer that crushed her. Israel said the driver couldn't see her, which was not true.

Handy lessons can be gleaned from Corrie's cynical murder, both by Priyanka Gandhi and

every foreign supporter of the Palestinian struggle. They are putting their careers and even lives on the line in taking on Israel's swindl and unchained Zionist regime. Crucially, Corrie's death by a bulldozer at Rafah reveals that the destruction of Palestinian homes and attempted erasure of their cultural motifs were a perennial and unending process for Zionist occupation, quite unrelated to the events of Oct 7, 2023.

Moreover, Zionism, the nefarious doctrine that created and continues to drive Israel as a usurper of a peaceful people's rights, is as distinct from Judaism as Hindutva is from Hinduism or extreme Muslim ideologies from Islam. Right-wing Christian evangelists in America complete the current religious trio shoring up Zionism. Hindutva in India, Muslim extremists in Syria,

Handy lessons can be gleaned from Corrie's murder, both by Priyanka Gandhi and every foreign supporter of the Palestinian struggle.

and right-wing evangelical Christians in the US have emerged as major props for Zionism. Opposing it has never been easy.

That's the risk John F. Kennedy took when he vehemently slammed Israel's illegitimate assembling of its nuclear arsenal. Grudgingly released documents showed how Kennedy demanded that Israel shut down its nuclear weapons programme and open up its laboratories for transparent inspection. The demand it turns out, was resented by powerful CIA operatives with links to Israel. JFK's brother Robert Kennedy as US attorney general had asked AIPAC, the Israeli lobbying group, to register as all other such firms did. As presidential candidate in 1968, he called for the Israeli government to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

Bobby Kennedy asserted that the Israeli government was essentially engaged in lobbying and should, therefore, comply with the same foreign

lobbying regulations as other foreign entities, including registering and disclosing their activities under FARA. Both brothers were assassinated while every academic and investigative bid to link the assassinations with the growing power of the Zionist lobby in the US is predictably undermined as a conspiracy theory, a convenient term to shut down even a line of thinking that questions given narratives. That Israel spied on the US and at least on one occasion attacked a US spy ship in the Mediterranean during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, killing dozens of US troops, is mostly airbrushed from public discourse.

President Kennedy attracted Israeli suspicion for even more reasons. One such was the unprecedented aplomb and ceremony with which he had received free Algeria's socialist president Ahmed Ben Bella to the White House. The welcome was repeated when Kennedy went up the plane's ladder to receive socialist Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru. He then launched his campaign for global peace that induced a memorable visit to Washington, D.C. by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. It was considered a provocative move by the deep state. Israel's claim to fame (or notoriety) in India in recent days is the eavesdropping malware it has helped plant in the phones of Modi critics.

Beyond the obvious challenges faced by Priyanka Gandhi in taking on Israel in solidarity with the Palestinians, and away from the fact that a leading victim of Israel-supported eavesdropping in India was Rahul Gandhi, there is the startling fact that Zionism and Hindutva share a common fascist link inspired by Mussolini. While Hindutva's early ideologues bodily lifted the basic organisational lessons from the Duce himself, early Zionists too trained in fascist Italy to wage a violent terror campaign in Palestine. According to an analysis posted on the US Office of Justice website, in 1929, the Irgun was formed under the leadership of Vladimir Jabotinsky "to assume an offensive terrorist strategy against the Arabs..." Who was Jabotinsky? A Zionist protégé of Mussolini. The challenge for Priyanka and others fighting for justice for Palestine is therefore complex and requires one to be watchful of the approaching bulldozer, something Rachel Corrie missed. ■



Climate priorities

The mistakes have not been addressed even three years after the super floods of 2022.

THE monsoons came earlier this year. But they were not unexpected. The very people who had been warning us of a terrible summer with its punishing heat had also cautioned that the rains would come early and would come down hard. And yet, the country continued to be distracted by the usual business of politics.

It is no wonder then that the ferocity of the rains took most of us by surprise in the mountains, in the plains and in the cities — both those we claim are well run and those where the governance crisis is so severe that we discuss it ad infinitum. Partisan views aside, there is little evidence anywhere of any of the governments — provincial or federal — being prepared to deal with the rage of climate change. In fact, in most places, when nature spins out of control, it is helped in its destruction by the mistakes of governance.

The mistakes have not been addressed even though it has been three years since the super floods of 2022. The havoc that the deluge caused should have convinced us to change our errant ways. But it seems that it has not.

The rains, their pattern, the rising temperatures, even the pollution in winters — how often has everyone been warning about them and about what some of these factors mean for our mountains and glaciers? But governments are said to have encouraged or turned a blind eye to those wielding the axe. According to those who keep an eye on the issue, the rate of deforestation has a direct link with the damage caused in the northern parts of the country.

Even after the devastation, there is not much discussion of what needs to change. Judging from the actions of those in power to most of the reporting on the issue, there is little effort to understand what has happened. Had it not been for the footage on social media, I doubt most of us would even know about the level of destruction. Indeed,

our reporting and the ensuing discussion are about some missing technology — the early warning system — which got stuck in bureaucratic red tape. That is a story which appeals to us far more than the cutting down of trees in the north.

But I would be wrong to say that this is the only preferred topic. Encroachments are another favourite subject. The encroachments on riverbeds have been a recurring theme since the 2010 floods but neither the people, who have to pay to reconstruct the 'encroachments' again and again, or the government, which has to help the people pick up the pieces, makes any difference to the policies or administrations that allow this. Come the next floods, and the hotels by the river will still be there.

Sadly, despite this scenario, prime ministers and chief ministers will only talk about this. Shehbaz Sharif, who mentioned it during his trip to the affected areas up north recently, is no different.

If I make a guess, then encroachments and their removal tend to be a comfortable subject for most of our ruling elite, regardless of party or province. It is somehow linked with their idea of good governance — for instance, bigger, wider roads for cars or the space to build automobiles, as well as their discomfort perhaps with shabby buildings or carts owned by the poor. And because it is easy to implement their words in the case of poor segments, it's a comforting promise to make.

The idea or notion of encroachments is complex and can also refer to the overreach of the rich, which is easily ignored. Rarely do we refer to the upmarket housing societies built on prime agricultural land as encroachments, or even to expensive homes whose construction involves covering water channels or altering the level of the riverbed.

Indeed, nearly every year, Islamabad is wit-

ness to chaos as rainwater makes its way through land where its path has been blocked or narrowed. And yet, the conversation about encroachments for us begins and ends with images of a shoddy hotel falling into a river in the north of the country. Or the cart of the poor person or the shantytowns where migrants live. But be it the environment or security, only some of these 'encroachments' are tackled.

All of this happens because none of us want to accept that a large part of this environmental disaster is caused by our development model — be it in the cities or the mountains. A development model which thinks construction is progress — be it the hotels in the north or big interchanges, wide roads in the middle of cities or sprawling housing societies on their outskirts. Indeed, other than Karachi, no city in Pakistan is trying to encourage vertical growth; it's far easier to allow property developers to cut down trees, take over agricultural land and build housing societies on it.

Of course, all of this is connected to Pakistan's population explosion. And this is a topic that we just can't be bothered to discuss — ever.

All of this *ronadhona* (and it is little else than lamenting) might sound familiar to regular readers (if there are any) of this space. But it is hard to avoid this as the environmental crisis grows with every passing season and every passing year. In the meantime, it appears hopeful that unlike three years ago, the entire focus of our ruling elite is not to speak of climate justice and ask the world for money to fix this.

Though only time will tell if this relative silence means they are ready to take some responsibility or not — responsibility which moves beyond announcing compensation and then providing it to some extent. ■

Enigmatic ties?

THE Pakistan-US relationship is an enigma. Just when you think you've solved the puzzle, there's an unexpected twist, like the present uptick in relations, the suddenness of which is as intriguing as its future is hazy.

What is familiar, and new, about the resurgence in ties? There are echoes here of the previous high-profile engagements, ie, they are being conducted at the highest levels with high-sounding rhetoric amid an air of great expectations. The White House and Pakistan's military leadership are the guiding spirit, as they were in the past three peak engagements — the early Cold War period and the two Afghan wars.

The issues and context of relations, however, are both old and new. The arrest by Pakistan early this year of the mastermind of the Abbey Gate bombing at Kabul airport in 2021 demonstrated Islamabad's continued high value as a counterterrorism partner against transnational terrorist groups like IS-K, which threaten the US and global security. The bombing killed 182 people including 13 US soldiers. The security issue is important in domestic politics, and to President Donald Trump's image as a strong leader.

The prospects of enhanced economic ties, especially in oil exploration, mines and minerals, IT and cryptocurrency and the expanded trade promised by the tariff deal form an entirely new area. But Trump's repetition of his offer to mediate on Kashmir has little practical value as India won't accept it. The offer has less to do with Kashmir and more to do with his desire to create public goodwill in Pakistan for himself and flaunt his image globally as a peacemaker.

A succession of events has led to this quick-fire ignition of the relationship. Pakistan's investment potential had engaged Trump's attention through Steve Witkoff, his foreign policy special envoy, whose son Zach Witkoff is a cofounder of World Liberty Financial, a Trump-backed cryptocurrency. During a trip to Pakistan early this year he spoke of the country's "trillions of dollars" of minerals, and of exciting investment opportunities, linking mineral wealth to cryptocurrency infrastructure.

And then, Pakistan's role in apprehending the Abbey Gate bomber validated the positive impression of influential former Centcom chief Gen Michael Kurilla of Pakistan's geographical position and value as an intelligence and military partner — not just in Afghanistan but also on the margins of the Middle East, especially in the vicinity of Iran and the Persian Gulf. Pakistan's impressive military and diplomatic performance in the four-day war against India added another dimension to

this image — that of competence, self-confidence and stability. Field Marshal Asim Munir's meeting with Trump likely cemented the overall favourable impression.

These developments took place at the confluence of Trump's geopolitics and economic policies that could have favourable implications for Pakistan. In Trump's view, geopolitics matters but is subordinate or adapted to the economic interests of America and the billionaires forming the ruling circles. We saw a glimpse of that at the Alaska summit. America's global primacy still counts but it is more economic and technological, especially in AI.

But Trump knows America can retain its economic primacy only in a globalised economy and there is no global economy without China, Russia and even India. He is involved in a broader effort to "reconfigure global trade, finance and security". And relations with Pakistan may be a small part of that effort, giving him leverage in relations with China and India, where he

seeks greater market access. He would like China to agree to a managed global competition with the US.

Leverage is central to Trump's negotiating stra-

tegy; all three relationships, with China, India and Pakistan, are in a way being used as cards against each other. Pakistan must watch these developments and remain alert to what Trump may demand in future that could force it to confront painful strategic choices.

In fact, the relationship has become a factor in many of Trump's ongoing manoeuvres, with an uncertain future. And that's not the only factor lending uncertainty to the future of Pak-US ties. Pakistan's rare earth minerals lie at the centre of Washington's new attraction. But its viability as an economic partner remains untested, because of the security situation in Balochistan and KP, where the critical minerals are located. And Pakistan's economy continues to rely on IMF bailouts and debt rollovers.

Most importantly, a relationship being driven by an individual, especially a leader like Trump, who seeks no institutional support, is precarious. In Trump's world, any country is dispensable. And no policy is sacrosanct. Remember, all previous US engagements with Pakistan have been one-off. ■

Solar revolution

THE energy industry, as we know it, is driving climate change at full speed. Energy production accounts for over three quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions that blanket the earth, trapping the sun's heat, raising temperatures, changing weather patterns and disturbing the balance of nature.

While the need to substantially increase the share of renewables is widely accepted, it is also recognised that it will take a long-haul effort to wean the global economy off its dependence on fossil fuels — a must if the Paris climate accord target of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels is to be realised.

Achieving these targets requires rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, as well as substantial investments. The IPCC put the annual average investment needed in the energy system at around 2.4 trillion, representing about 2.5pc of global GDP. Post-pandemic, countries still face financial challenges, which are further complicated by geopolitical conflicts in various regions. The Ukraine war caused an energy crisis. Hence, investments in renewables were pushed to the back-burner dampening hopes for a quick green transition.

However, despite these challenges, the tide is gradually turning in support of renewables. Endeavours for transitioning to clean energy have received a big boost, thanks to a strong business sense and market dynamics attracting significant financial flows.

Several other factors are also changing the trend in favour of renewables, particularly in the solar sector where a sharp decline in prices of photovoltaics or PV panels has made the technology more affordable. In addition, its accessibility in areas beyond the reach of grids and its reliability against the frequent disruptions of grid power, especially in developing countries, has made it an obvious choice.

A report unveiled by UN Secretary General António Guterres in July outlines the rising graph of renewable energy and its accompanying economic opportunities: clean energy sectors drove 10pc of global GDP growth in 2023 alone, while clean energy jobs now employ almost 35 million people across the world, dwarfing fossil fuel job numbers. Investments in renewables have touched the \$2tr mark for the first time, bringing in their wake millions of new job opportunities. This rate of investment through 2030 will enable the world to meet the target of tripling renewables.

Another report by the global energy think tank Ember shows that solar generation has doubled over the last three years

and was the largest source of new electricity generation for the third year in a row. In global renewable production, solar and wind energy together have surpassed the share of hydropower for the first time.

Pakistan's solar sector is also registering sizeable and rapid growth. The UN secretary general's report prominently features Pakistan's solar boom as a prime example of the potential and adaptability of renewables to safeguard energy sovereignty amidst current global challenges.

In the first seven months of 2024 alone, Pakistan imported 12.5 GW of solar panels positioning itself as one of the world's fastest-growing solar markets. With more than 300 days of sunlight annually, the target of renewable energy making 60pc of its energy mix by 2030 looks reachable. However, a stark urban-rural electrification divide highlights the need for urgent action to prioritise off-grid solutions. Policy interventions are badly needed to ensure that the benefits of the solar revolution are also shared with the more than 40m people still living without access to electricity in rural Pakistan.

Several factors are changing the trend in favour of renewables.

es that "since the Paris Agreement entered into force in 2016, less than one out of every five dollars invested in clean energy has gone to developing countries". In 2024, they received just 15pc of global clean energy spending. Africa, home to a fifth of the world's population and 85pc of the global population without electricity access, received a mere 2pc of the global total.

Leaving behind such a large number of people in darkness and poverty is not in sync with the spirit of the SDGs, nor will it help achieve sustainable development for all by 2030. This energy divide can only be narrowed by a balanced and broad-based clean energy investment plan for developing countries, with contributions from the private sector. The leading economies of the G20, accounting for 80pc of global carbon emissions, must lead the way at the upcoming COP30 for bridging climate funding gaps. ■

New BD Army chief

DACCA: The Bangladesh Government last night [Aug 24] appointed a new Army Chief of Staff and announced the release of two prominent political prisoners. Maj-Gen. Ziaur Rahman replaced Maj-Gen. K.M. Shafiullah as Staff Chief. Gen. Rahman was a Major in the Pakistani Army. Those released were Masihur Rahman, Secretary of the now defunct National Awami Party (Bhashani group), and Ali Ahad, chief of the Bangla Jatiya (National) League.....[B]angladesh Radio, in a special bulletin ... said Gen Ziaur Rahman had taken over from Maj-Gen. Shafiullah....[G]en Ziaur Rahman ... is regarded as a tough, right-wing, professional soldier who has always been popular with his men.

[A report from Islamabad adds,] Bangladesh President Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmed has sent a message to Prime Minister Bhutto gratefully acknowledging spontaneous gestures from Pakistan and saying that his Government and people confidently looked forward to normalisation and the earliest opening of a new chapter between the two countries. The message, officially released here today [Aug 25], is in reply to messages the Bangladesh President received from the Prime Minister. — News agencies

Assam losses

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GAUHATI: Assam has suffered a loss of about 10 crores of rupees in damage to immovable property and cattle wealth ... caused by the recent earthquake and floods, according to unofficial estimates. It is feared that the loss in human life will run into four figures when details from tribal villages are available. Hundreds of villages in Upper Assam were under flood waters of the River Dehing and its tributary Sessa.

Earthquake shocks continued today [Aug 25] ... Four such tremors were felt at Dibrugarh between eight and ten this morning, and the fifth at 2 p.m. The River Dening has been silted by a rise in its bed at one place.... A dredger has been employed to clear the river.

The Brahmaputra again swelled today after ... three days, and ... huge pieces of timber and other kinds of wood [flowed] down the river.... Steamer services in and around Gauhati are affected ... [largely] by the ... timber ... and the river service between Dibrugarh and Dishangmukh has been ... paralysed. The Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Sardar Patel, have [appealed] to the public to contribute generously ... to the Assam Governor's Earthquake Relief Fund. — News agencies

Behind the facade of victimisation

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THOUGH Pakistan has experienced all forms of governance — from autocracy to democracy, and from oligarchy to hybrid — since its inception, the country is still striving hard to practice and experience genuinely true democracy, which, according to political experts, is still a distant dream.

It is also true that electoral processes and procedures have been dubious to a large extent, but the people of Pakistan have somehow enjoyed democracy. The victors in electoral exercises have always termed the elections impartial, unbiased, free and fair, while the losers have never accepted their defeat, terming the electoral processes dubious and massively rigged.

Even today the main opposition party continues to claim to be the winner in the previous general elections that were held in February 2024, propagating an anti-establishment agenda among its sympathisers. This is done through heavily-funded social media teams and keyboard warriors who left no stone unturned in concocting facts and fabricating false narratives built at the behest of the party leadership, mainly focusing on maligning the previous regimes and the country's security establishment.

After being ousted from power in April 2022 by a political alliance through a successful no-confidence move in the National Assembly, the party orchestrated and executed riots the following year on May 9. Since then, it has been paying the price of such indiscretions.

The party has recently released through its media cell a dossier, titled: 'Detention of former prime minister Imran Khan: political victimisation and human rights abuses'.

It is really an ironic development as the anarchists and rioters have been claiming

to be the 'victims' of human rights violations. The 12-page dossier seems to be a tale of misleading accounts and fabricated narratives as the party in question itself has been blatantly involved in orchestrating nefarious plots against the state and the country.

The blockades of roads and highways across the country by party goons to get the 'leader' freed from prison on Aug 5, marked as Youm-i-Istehsal to show solidarity with Kashmiris, was another example of the party's fascist approach.

It is unfortunate that the said party has continuously been living in a state of denial. Instead of realising its follies, it has been misleading the people as well as the international community, projecting itself as a 'victim'.

It is imperative for all the global human rights organisations named in the said dossier to ascertain the facts on their own. The sane segments of society must differentiate between freedom of expression and freedom to cause destruction.

The country's Constitution has given the people the right to peaceful protest, but it does not allow anyone to go against sanctity and sovereignty of the state.

Prof Sajjad Khattak
Attock

A day at the clinic

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I RECENTLY went to get an appointment for a relative with a specialist doctor in Hyderabad. When I arrived at his private clinic, there were many already waiting for their turn. After about an hour, the receptionist gave me an appointment of four days later, but did not specify the time.

I felt it a bit strange, but could not argue because of the many others who were waiting behind me to get the attention of the receptionist.

On the appointed day, I arrived at the clinic at 8am, but had to wait for 45 minutes to get my number in the queue. My appointment number was 15, and I was told that it would be called at around 1pm. I went home, picked up the patient, and returned at around 12.30pm only to find that the patient being seen by the doctor at the time was the holder of Token No 3.

We waited for nearly three more hours, and my number was called at 3.40pm. I heaved a sigh of relief, thinking the ordeal was over, but I was wrong. I was actually called to see the compounder, who simply handed me a slip for medical tests and told me to get them done at a specific laboratory.

I had no choice. I went to the lab and became part of another long queue. We finally got the test results at 8pm, returned to the clinic, and waited for our turn, which came after 8.30pm; after four days of anticipation and over 12 hours of waiting. What kind of clinical practice is this?

Talat Aziz
Hyderabad

is not only illogical, it imposes unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles on students and their families.

The students are forced to go through a lengthy and sometimes frustrating process to obtain domiciles, involving multiple visits to relevant government offices, document verifications, and, in some cases, 'unofficial fee'.

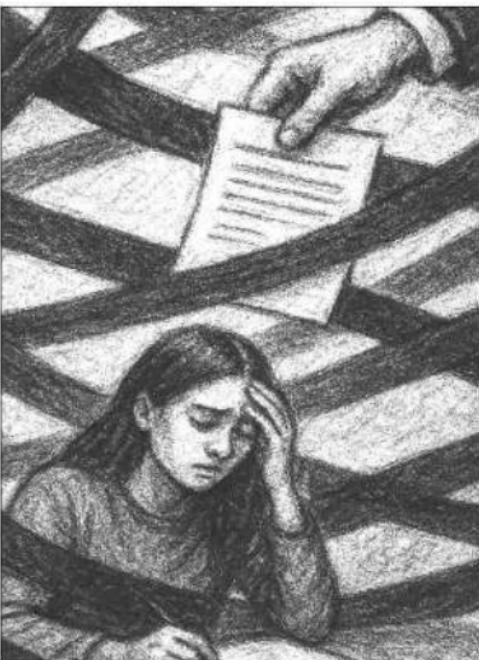
This wastes valuable time, energy and financial resources, especially when the students' identity, citizenship and family information are already recorded with the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) in the shape of CNIC or Form B.

Domicile certificates should be restricted to quota-based or reserved seats where the applicant's provincial or district affiliation is legally relevant. It is time the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and provincial education departments reviewed and revised the rather outdated requirement.

Simplifying the entire admission process would reduce stress on students, and help promote fair access to higher education.

Ria Ahmed

Lahore



Illogical requirement

RECENTLY, I had to go through a lot of trouble to get my daughter's admission to an undergraduate programme at public-sector universities in Lahore owing to unjustified requirement of a domicile certificate for admissions under the open merit category.

Despite clearing the admission test and interview, my daughter was refused admission for not producing domicile certificate within 24 hours, whereas the standard time for the task is 16 days. The issue affects thousands of students applying on open merit every year.

Public universities in various provinces continue to demand domicile certificates from all applicants, even for open merit seats against which no regional or provincial quota is applicable. This policy

and who later became the president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), called upon him. Following this meeting, Abu Dhabi issued a guarantee in favour of the College of Regulators.

In contrast to what the said writer has asserted, there are credible reports from relevant quarters that actually in a private meeting, Sheikh Zayed told Mr Abedi: "You look after your health, we will look after the other things."

Finally, contrary to what the article has said, the BCCI did not 'collapse'; it was closed and shut down despite being a perfectly liquid bank.

After 1991, several global banks have been charged and penalised for the same 'errors of judgment' as was the case with BCCI. They were censured and penalised, but not allowed to 'collapse' or suffer a 'shutdown'. A dead lion is everybody's meal.

Sirajuddin Aziz

Karachi

Some BCCI 'truths'

THIS is with reference to the article 'Milk and money' (Aug 14). History by its very nature is about the past. The distance between the event and its recording gives a lavish opportunity to historians to indulge in fictionalising the event if they so desire. In doing so, what gets recorded many a time has little correlation to what may have actually happened. In any case, history written about the vanquished always tends to be lopsided in favour of the victor.

And, finally, when the 'actors' have faded away into oblivion, the historian receives no challenge. All these thoughts came to mind while going through the said article that, among other things, had a few things to say about the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) and its founder, Agha Hassan Abedi.

The remark attributed to Mr Abedi during a conversation with a high-ranking official of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) — "... BCCI no longer needed ADNOC's business" — is far-fetched and inconceivable. No banker worth his salt could say such a thing to any client, let alone ADNOC. This is a pure and simple fable; a figment of someone's imagination.

Further, a fact that can be checked by objective historian is that when Mr Abedi had visited Abu Dhabi back in 1991, he was put up in a five-star hotel, with his wife and with due government protocol.

Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed, who at the time was the crown prince of Abu Dhabi

Bodies of two more flood victims found in Shangla

By Our Correspondent

SHANGLA: Two more bodies were recovered on Monday, taking the toll from the recent flash floods in Shangla district to 31.

Rasool Khan Sharif, spokesperson for Rescue 1122, told *Dawn* that seven persons had been washed away in the flooding from Shati Dara area of Puran tehsil on August 15.

He said the bodies, including that of a woman, were recovered from the River Indus, and handed over to families after an identification procedure.

Rescue 1122 spokesperson said search operation for the remaining five persons was continuing despite heavy rain.

Meanwhile, deputy commissioner Mohammad Fawad Khan, in a statement, said flash floods and landslides triggered by a fresh rain spell had hit Yakhtangay, Drad and Kana areas.

He said eight houses collapsed in three different villages. However, no human losses were reported.

He said 37 cattle heads also perished in the landslides in the Olandar Takai area of the Kana tehsil.

Heavy rain coupled with thunderstorm continued to lash across the district for the second consecutive day on Monday, disrupting electric supply in several areas.

Policeman injured in Bannu attack

LAKKI MARWAT: A police official was injured when unknown motorcyclists attacked a police post with a hand grenade in Dary Pull area of Bannu district on Sunday night.

An official confirmed the attack occurred in the limits of Ghoriwala police station and said the grenade exploded with a bang, causing injuries to the deputy in-charge officer Rafiullah.

He said the wounded cop was immediately moved to the District Headquarters Hospital.

"The assailants fled the place after the attack," he added. He said a large police contingent reached the venue of attack and launched a search in the area for the attackers.

Meanwhile, the police on Monday arrested the kingpin of a criminals' gang along with his accomplice in injured condition after an exchange of fire in Bannu.

An official said a party of the Basyakhel police station accompanied by the Ababeel Squad was dispatched to the Bazeeda Kokalkhel area when local police authorities were informed about the presence of a outlaw, Amir, and his accomplices there.

He said the wanted criminals noticed the policemen and attacked them with their weapons.

"The cops also took positions and returned the fire, triggering a gunfight," he said.

The official said when the exchange of fire stopped the police launched a search and arrested Amir, the ringleader of the gang, and his accomplice, Sufyan, and seized an assault rifle, a pistol and ammunition from them.

He said that a third accomplice of the arrested suspects managed to flee taking the advantage of dense forest. — Correspondent

Placer gold mining in River Indus banned

KOHAT: Kohat division commissioner Syed Motasim Billah has banned the illegal placer gold mining in the River Indus under the Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code as it posed health hazards to humans and aquatic life.

He has directed all the deputy commissioners, district police officers and other authorities concerned across the division to ensure strict compliance of the ban.

He emphasised that violators of the ban must not be spared from any stern action.

He issued these directions while chairing a high-level meeting held at his office here.

Deputy commissioners, DPOs and other relevant officers attended the meeting through video link. The meeting also reviewed progress on dengue prevention measures and implementation of the chief minister's 'Awami Agenda'.

The commissioner directed the health department to launch effective measures and awareness campaigns against the dengue at the district, tehsil and union council levels.

He also appealed to the public to keep their homes, neighbourhoods and surroundings clean. — Correspondent

KP lawmakers elected on reserved seats refuse to take oath for second time

Opposition stages walkout; house continues discussion on law and order situation amid calls for joint peace efforts

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR: Members of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly elected on seats reserved for women and non-Muslims on Monday refused to take oath as lawmakers for the second time and walked out of the house.

Soon after the sitting began, Deputy Speaker Suriya Bibi, who was in the chair, said that before moving towards other agenda items, it was incumbent upon her to place a “constitutional matter of utmost importance on record.”

She said that the session was summoned under Article 109 of the Constitution.

Ms Bibi said the first sitting was held on July 20 to administer oath to the new assembly members elected on reserved seats, but a member pointed out a lack of quorum in the house, causing the session’s adjournment.

“Through the administrative order of the Peshawar High Court, the governor later administered oaths to those members. The matter was challenged by Speaker of the KP Assembly Babar Saleem Swati with the high court. He also approached the Supreme Court,”

she said.

The chair asked those lawmakers to stand in their seats to take oath, but the latter refused to comply.

“Taking oath is mandatory for strangers but I don’t see any stranger here,” Leader of the Opposition Dr Ibadullah said, adding that the lawmakers elected on reserved seats had taken oath under Article 255 (2) of the Constitution and participated in legislation.

He said that those MPAs were members of the house.

Dr Ibadullah said that the Election Commission of Pakistan had reached out to the high court, prompting the nomination of the governor to administer oaths to the newly-elected lawmakers. He later announced a walkout by opposition members from the house along with those MPAs.

Meanwhile, the house continued to discuss the law and order situation in the province, with members advocating for joint peace efforts. They said peace was imperative for the province’s development.

MPA Mohammad Usman Khan said the law and order situation in his constituency was so volatile that mortar shells, fired from unidentified locations, targeted children.

He said joint efforts were required to effectively address the issue.

“Law and order can be restored through negotiations with all stakeholders and not through military operations,” he said.

ANP member Arbab Mohammad Usman called for joint efforts to restore peace in the province.

He accused the PTI of “showing the

military establishment the path to power politics.”

The lawmaker said that his party was targeted by terrorists but it stood firm against them.

He alleged that the PTI wanted to strike a deal with militants and paid extortion money to them.

Higher education minister Mena Khan Afridi said the opposition always criticised the government but never came up with any suggestions for a better law and order situation in the province.

He said that the house was constantly conveying to the Centre its strong opposition to military operations, insisting such actions will never restore peace, but the opposition never talked about stopping cross-border infiltration.

During the question hour, member of the opposition PML-N Sobia Shahid said that she was not satisfied with the excise department’s answer to her question about the number of vehicles it possessed.

She claimed that some excise vehicles were parked at the houses of retired government officials. The lawmaker urged excise minister Khaleequr Rehman to support her call for referring the question to the relevant house committee for deliberation.

However, the minister insisted that his department had responded to the question in detail. He said if the PML-N MPA wanted more details about the matter, she should submit another question.

The opposition member responded that if the minister was reluctant to have further discussion on the matter, it meant there was something wrong.

Treasury MPA Akbar Ayub chal-

lenged the PML-N lawmaker to share details of all those vehicles parked unlawfully at the retired officers’ houses.

Ms Shahid claimed that three vehicles were parked at the former MPA’s house from PK-74, while one was present at the house of former secretary Adeel Shah.

However, Mr Ayub insisted that lawmaker from PK-74 Arbab Jandad had rented land to the excise department for parking vehicles, while Mr Shah was still in service.

In a calling attention notice, member of the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party Ahmad Karim Kundi said that in the province, aquatic life, including several species of fishes, were endangered due to electrofishing and use of explosives and dangerous chemicals for catching fish.

Parliamentary secretary Adeel Iqbal said people resorting to such illegal fishing methods were penalised and booked.

MPA Kundi requested the chair to refer his calling attention notice to the relevant house committee for recommending a strategy to check the illegal practices. The notice was later sent to the relevant house committee.

The house passed the KP Appointment, Deputation, Posting and Transfer of Teachers, Lecturers, Instructors and Doctors Regulatory (Amendment) Bill, 2025, which was tabled by law minister Aftab Alam Afridi.

The assembly also passed the KP Road, Transport Workers Amendment Bill, 2025, which was presented by the chief minister’s special assistant on transport and mass transit, Rangez Khan. The chair later adjourned the sitting until 2pm today (Tuesday).

Bajaur IDPs protest ‘denial’ of relief goods

By Our Correspondent

BAJAURO: Residents of the areas hit by the military operation here on Monday staged a protest demonstration against the denial of relief goods to them.

A number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) belonging to various areas of the restive Lowi Mamund and War Mamund tehsils attended the demonstration held at the Civil Colony Khar.

The participants said they were forced to live in relief camps, relatives' homes and with local community members.

However, they alleged they had yet to receive relief goods.

Some protesters criticised the mechanism for distributing relief goods, including edible and non-edible items, alleging influential people were given

special preference.

The protesters also complained about the slow paced registration of IDPs for the government's financial package. They urged the district administration and other relevant authorities to ensure transparency in the relief goods distribution.

They ended their protest after assistant commissioner Dr Sadiq Ali assured them that relief goods would be provided in accordance with the Provincial Disaster Management Authority's policy for IDPs once the registration process was completed.

The official said all-out efforts were being made to ensure relief goods reached the most deserving families.

He said the district administration was also working to ensure the early and dignified return of all IDPs to their homes.

Govt urged to extend psychological support to flood victims

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Dawn Report

PESHAWAR/LOWER DIR: Al-Khidmat Foundation (AKF), the humanitarian wing of Jamaat-i-Islami, has demanded of the provincial and federal governments to provide immediate psychological support to the flood-hit people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Speaking at a news conference at the Peshawar Press Club on Monday, Ayesha Syed, central leader of the charity's women wing, said that the people in flood-hit areas were suffering from severe psychological trauma and the government needed to send teams of psychologists to provide counseling and support to them.

She criticised the National Disaster Management Authority for its 'silence' on the issue and demanded that it should utilise international and local funds to provide support to the calamity-hit people.

She highlighted the AKF

efforts, providing support to orphans, widows, and vulnerable women hit by the deluge.

Accompanied by former MNA Inayatullah Begun, Samina Yaqoob and others, Ms Syed said the foundation was taking full responsibility for the care of orphans and widows in the flood-hit areas.

She announced the foundation would start a rehabilitation operation in the second phase, and sought government and people's help in that regard.

Ms Syed emphasised that this was time to provide support to the affected people, not to engage in politics.

She said over 7,000 AKF volunteers were actively involved in rescue and relief efforts in the deluge-hit areas.

She said there was a risk of disease outbreak in the affected areas, and the government needed to take measures to prevent it.

She said the foundation had provided medical services to over

24,000 people through its mobile health units and medical camps.

In addition, she said they had provided food and shelter to thousands of people affected by the floods.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-i-Islami Hazara chief Abdul Razzaq Abbasi on Monday handed over Rs5 million in cash and relief goods worth Rs3 million to the JI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (North) chief Inayatullah Khan at Gulabad in Lower Dir for onward distribution among the flood-hit families of the Malakand division.

Speaking at the handing-over ceremony, Mr Abbasi said Hazara division itself had been badly affected by the recent floods, yet people of the region considered it their religious and moral responsibility to support the calamity-stricken families of Malakand.

He said extending a helping hand in testing times was the true spirit of brotherhood and solidarity. He assured that relief and assistance from Hazara would continue in the days to come.

Data collection to ensure timely disease response in flood-hit areas

Report says 21,853 cases of communicable ailments recorded in affected districts

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR: Health department has deployed teams in flood-stricken districts to scale up knowledge of healthcare providers on case definitions of priority diseases and importance of timely data

compilation to prevent further transmission as Public Health Reference Laboratory has started collecting samples of affected people to ascertain the onset of epidemics.

A health department team on Monday visited Buner, the worst-hit district, where it inspected medical camps set up by the department and partner organisations and gave them tips about compiling data of prevalent ailments so that timely response could be ensured, a press release said.

Dr Shahid Yunis, the director-general of health services, said that they focused on

recording and reporting of communicable disease cases. Presently, situation was under control as the department was in close contact with district health authorities regarding prevalence of diseases and requirements of medical supplies, he said.

He said that the local administrations were on board to ensure that the medical staff deployed in the calamity-hit districts work in coordination with partner organisations and avoid duplication of activities.

Meanwhile, Public Health Reference Laboratory of Khyber Medical University has set up camps in Buner to

provide treatment as well diagnostic services to people.

Lab scientists at these camps said that they were recording most cases of malaria because people were exposed to mosquito-bites due to power outages caused by the floods. However, they said that

health department dispatched medicines as well as bed nets to safeguard people against vector-borne diseases.

A press release said that KMU Vice-chancellor Prof Ziaul Haq has deployed its PHRL team in Buner following the recent floods. The team, consisting of trained medical laboratory technicians and

specialists, is providing to people diagnostic and healthcare services in coordination with the district health officer.

System (IDSRS) of the public health section at directorate-general health services, so far 350,329 patients have been examined in flood-affected districts. It said that 21,853 cases of communicable diseases were reported, including 3,256 cases recorded during the last 24 hours.

The province-wide report said that 54 dengue patients were detected in the last 24 hours, making the total tally of the vector-borne diseases 595 this year so far. Of the total patients, 527 have recovered and the number of active cases is 68.

Only 44 patients are currently under-treatment in three hospitals including 38 in

district headquarters hospital Charsadda, 38 in Qazi Hussain Ahmed Medical Complex Nowshera and three in King Abdullah Teaching Hospital Mansehra.

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According to a report released by Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response

Senate panel questions tariff hike by Jazz

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Slams Ufone for incurring losses; PTA rejects cartelisation claims

By Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology and Telecommunication was informed on Monday that there was no evidence of cartelisation in Pakistan's telecom sector. The committee sought clarification from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) regarding an audit report related to a tariff increase by the country's largest telecom company, Jazz.

PTA Chairman retired Major General Hafeez Ur Rehman assured the committee that no cartelisation had been

allowed within the sector. As the significant market player (SMP), Jazz must seek approval from the PTA before making any changes to its tariff rates, he explained.

Senator Palwasha Khan, chairperson of the committee, questioned how Jazz had managed to collect over Rs6 billion more from its customers. In response, Rehman clarified that Jazz had raised its tariffs by 19pc in 2024, but this increase was regulated by the PTA to maintain market balance. "If Jazz exceeds the permitted tariff limit, the PTA ensures the excess amount is refunded," he stated. Despite these regulatory constraints, Jazz remains a well-managed, profitable company, he added.

The committee also raised concerns about the financial performance of Ufone, one of the four telecom companies operating in Pakistan. It was

revealed that Ufone, the state-owned entity, was the only telecom operator making losses. Senator Humayun Mohmand criticised the performance, noting that since the government holds the majority shares in Ufone, it should not be making losses.

In contrast, Senator Afnanullah pointed out that Ufone's management is entirely from the private sector, with no government interference in its operations.

Addressing the committee's concerns about quality issues in the telecom sector, the chairman PTA said the problem could not be resolved until a fresh spectrum auction was held. He further informed the committee that he had recently met with the prime minister, requesting that the auction take place soon. The IT secretary added that Pakistan is currently using 274 MHz of

spectrum, but internet issues persist due to insufficient capacity, as well as ongoing legal cases related to some spectrum allocations.

When questioned by Senator Saifullah Niazi about the companies involved in the court cases, PTA officials refrained from naming them. The IT secretary shifted the responsibility to the Frequency Allocation Board, while the PTA clarified that the issue was being managed by PEMRA.

The committee also voiced concerns over the recent taxes imposed on e-commerce transactions. The IT secretary explained that the matter falls under the Ministry of Commerce, with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) responsible for imposing taxes. The discussion on e-commerce taxation and Ufone's financial losses will continue in the next committee meeting.

Flows from abroad surge 59pc in July

Pakistan receives \$695m in foreign loans and grants

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan began the new fiscal year with foreign inflows of \$695 million in July, a 59 per cent increase compared to the same month last year.

This boost came from \$675m in foreign loans and \$19m in grants, reflecting a significant rise from last year's \$426m in loans and \$10.5m in grants.

The uptick in inflows comes after the finalisation of Pakistan's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had been delayed following the approval of the federal budget. Despite this, the government was able to achieve robust growth in both loan and grant categories in July.

The target for foreign inflows in the current fiscal year has been set at \$19.9 billion, slightly higher than the \$19.4bn target for the previous year. This includes \$6.4bn from multilateral and bilateral lenders, \$400m in international bonds, \$3.1bn in foreign commercial loans, as well as substantial time deposits from Saudi Arabia and China.

In July 2023, Pakistan had secured over \$2.89bn in foreign loans, largely due to the signing of a 9-month Stand-By Agreement (SBA) with the IMF. This resulted in substantial inflows, including \$2bn from Saudi Arabia and \$1.2bn from the IMF. Overall, total inflows for July 2023 amounted to \$5.1bn.

However, this year's foreign inflows were significantly higher, with July seeing \$694.53m compared to \$436.39m in the same month last year. The Ministry of Economic Affairs (EAD) confirmed that out of this amount, \$246.47m were for project financing, a 20pc decline from the \$307m received in July 2024. On the other hand, non-project financing surged to \$448m in July 2025, up almost 250pc from \$129m a year earlier.

A notable development this year was the sharp increase in budget support loans, which reached \$196m in July, compared to just \$1.23m in the same month of 2024. This marks a record increase in budget financing, despite the annual target for budget support being set at \$13.5bn for the current year, lower than last year's target of \$15bn.

Pakistan was also able to secure \$100m from the Saudi Oil Facility in July, against an annual target of \$1bn. The government's overall foreign financing targets include \$5bn from multilateral lenders, excluding the IMF. In July, \$380m was received from multilateral lenders, up from \$201m in the same month last year, reflecting an increase in multilateral support despite the reduced full-year target of \$4.5bn.

Bilateral lenders, excluding the three strategic allies, contributed \$118m in July, slightly surpassing the \$108m from the previous year. The annual target for bilateral inflows stands at \$1.36bn. Total inflows from both bilateral and multilateral sources amounted to \$498.3m in July, against the annual target of \$6.4bn. Last year, Pakistan had received \$309m from these lenders, with an annual target of \$5.05bn.

Remittances from overseas Pakistanis also saw an uptick in July, with \$196.2m received through Naya Pakistan Certificates, a sharp rise from \$128m in July 2024. The government has projected a total of \$609m in remittances from these certificates for the current fiscal year.

The government's ambitious \$19.9bn target for foreign inflows in the current fiscal year includes \$6.4bn from multilateral and bilateral sources, \$400m in international bonds, \$3.1bn in foreign commercial loans, and substantial contributions from strategic allies, including \$5bn from Saudi Arabia in time deposits and \$4bn in SAFE deposits from China.

IT exports hit record

\$354m in July

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Pakistan's IT exports reached an all-time high of \$354 million in July, marking a 24 per cent year-on-year (YoY) and a 5pc month-on-month (MoM) rise.

This figure surpasses the 12-month average of \$317m, highlighting the sector's growth.

Sani Irfan of Topline Securities noted that export proceeds per day for July stood at \$15.4m, compared to \$17.8m in June. The overall increase was largely driven by the growth in computer services, which rose 10pc MoM to \$311m. Software consultancy exports, in particular, saw a notable increase, growing to \$104m in July from \$96m in June.

Irfan attributed the YoY growth to various factors, including the expansion of IT companies' client bases globally, especially in the GCC region. She also highlighted the relaxation in the permissible retention limit by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), which increased from 35pc to 50pc in Exporters' Specialized Foreign Currency Accounts. The allowance for equity investment abroad using these accounts and the stability of the Pakistani rupee encouraged IT exporters to bring a higher portion of their profits back to Pakistan.

A survey by the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA) revealed that 62pc of IT companies maintain specialised foreign currency accounts. The introduction of the Equity Investment Abroad (EIA) scheme by the SBP, which allows IT exporters to acquire foreign equity using up to 50pc of proceeds from these accounts, has further boosted confidence in remitting export proceeds.

SBP's sandbox to foster financial innovations

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has launched an initiative under its Regulatory Sandbox to promote inward remittances and foster innovation in the financial sector.

The move is part of the bank's broader Vision 2028 strategy.

In a circular issued on Monday, the SBP outlined the themes for the first cohort under its Regulatory Sandbox initiative. The focus will be on three key areas: technology-enabled solutions for inward remittances, open banking, and the remote on-boarding of merchants.

"The Regulatory Sandbox aims to encourage innovation within the financial sector

while ensuring consumer protection and maintaining financial stability," the SBP said in its circular. The initiative will allow applicants to test their products and associated operational models in a controlled environment. This will also help the SBP refine and upgrade the regulatory framework in response to emerging technologies.

The SBP has called on individuals and firms with innovative ideas and products within the specified themes to apply for the programme.

The initiative aims to contribute to Pakistan's evolving fintech landscape and digital financial ecosystem.

Applications for the first cohort will be accepted from Aug 25 until Oct 5.

USC closure puts 11,000 jobs on the line

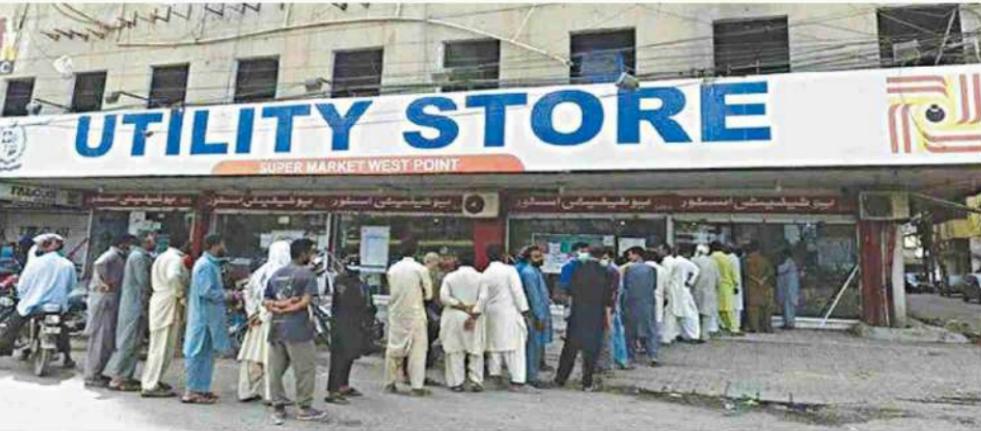
Govt commits Rs27bn in dues clearance to employees, vendors

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Privatisation was informed on Monday that the government will ensure the payment of Rs27 billion in dues to employees and vendors of the Utility Stores Corporation (USC) in two phases following its closure.

Chaired by Dr Muhammad Farooq Sattar, the committee was told that the closure of USC had been finalised, but safeguarding the rights of the approximately 11,000 workers was the government's top priority. The committee sought a detailed breakdown of the outstanding dues to be paid to employees and vendors, which the Privatisation Commission was asked to submit at the next meeting.

The committee was also briefed that while USC had operated profitably when subsidies were being provided, the withdrawal of these subsidies had led to operational losses. Committee members expressed serious concerns over the privatisation of USC, emphasising that continuing with the closure process despite the committee's recommendations was highly alarming.



DISCONTINUATION of subsidies led to the closure of once profitable utility stores.—AFP/file

In response, the Privatisation Commission's secretary informed the committee that the due diligence process for the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Ltd (PIACL) had already begun, with several business houses expressing interest. The privatisation process for PIA is expected to be completed by the last quarter of 2025.

The committee directed that the process be conducted transparently and asked the Privatisation Commission to present a list of members of the privatisation board at the next meeting.

On the ongoing issue of elec-

tricity loadshedding, the committee expressed concern over the situation across the country. The committee was informed that there is no electricity shortfall, but load management is being carried out. Feeders experiencing electricity theft or excessive line losses are subjected to load management.

The committee advised that instead of imposing load-shedding on entire feeders, electricity should be disconnected only for those areas or consumers found involved in theft or causing excessive losses.

Additionally, the committee recommended that the Minister for Power hold regional meetings

with members of the National Assembly to address public issues in their constituencies and take concrete actions to resolve them. Following a briefing on Pakistan Engineering Company (PECO), the committee instructed the government to resolve the company's issues.

The committee advised that efforts should first focus on restoring PECO, but if that proves unfeasible, privatisation should be considered. The committee also directed an inquiry into the irregularities during the tenure of former Managing Director Mairaj Anees Ariff and requested a detailed report on the matter.

Pakistan, B'desh forge stronger economic ties

Page 1

Joint Economic Commission to be reactivated after 20 years

By Mubarak Zeb Khan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Commerce Minister Jam Kamal's recent visit to Bangladesh marked a pivotal step in resetting long-term bilateral relations, with the signing of several key agreements aimed at enhancing regional connectivity and investment.

The most significant outcome was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a joint working group on trade. This new forum will bring together commerce officials from both nations to explore opportunities for boosting bilateral commerce, trade, and investment.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's trip to Dhaka also produced agreements on diplomatic visa waivers and institutional cooperation between foreign service academies, underscoring the growing diplomatic and eco-

nomic momentum between the two countries.

During his visit from August 20 to 25, Minister Kamal held a series of meetings with Bangladesh's key advisers, including those for industries, food, and commerce. He also engaged with leading business figures and visited important Chambers of Commerce and Industry. These engagements laid the groundwork for further strengthening trade ties between the two nations.

A crucial meeting with Bangladesh's Adviser for Commerce, Sheikh Bashir Uddin, resulted in an agreement to reactivate the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) forum, which had been dormant since its last meeting in 2005. The JEC will work to devise a comprehensive strategy to promote trade, investment, and economic collaboration between the two countries.

The discussions covered a wide range of sectors, including agricultural modernisation, renewable energy, steel industry, green ship-breaking, ship-building, dates, minerals, halal trade, sugar, leather, rice, and agro-processing. Both sides emphasised the need to improve trade connectivity and logistics to

reduce costs and increase efficiency.

One of the key topics addressed was the reduction of tariffs and duties, as well as preferential access for certain Bangladeshi products to the Pakistani market. Both sides acknowledged the vast untapped potential for bilateral trade and expressed confidence that the people of both countries would benefit from increased cooperation.

In a separate meeting with Bangladesh's Adviser for Industries, Adilur Rahman Khan, both sides underscored the importance of leveraging their respective economic and industrial strengths.

The discussions focused on critical issues such as food security, value addition in the food industry, and the alignment of industrial technology. Both countries agreed on the importance of mutual exchanges of expertise, delegations, and knowledge-sharing to strengthen their industrial collaboration.

Kamal expressed Pakistan's keen interest in becoming a partner in Bangladesh's evolving industrial landscape through joint ventures, collaboration, and mutual investment.

PSX loses 677 points on IMF concerns

By Muhammad Kashif

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) took a dip on Monday, as investors opted to take profits amid growing concerns over the release of the third tranche of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan. The market saw a volatile session, with the benchmark KSE-100 index fluctuating sharply before closing down.

Ahsan Mehanti of Arif Habib Corporation attributed the bearish market performance to institutional profit-taking in an overbought market. He highlighted the impact of flat government bond yields, foreign outflows, concerns over external debt, and losses in state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Furthermore, uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the IMF's next review, particularly the unmet conditions for provincial tax collection, added to investor anxiety.

PAKISTAN STOCK EXCHANGE				
THE TOP FIVE			ACTIVITY	
GAINERS		LOSERS	LEADERS*	
Dawood Lawrence	32.08	Unilever Foods	944.36	Kohinoor Spinning
Gadoon Textile	31.95	PIA Holding CoB	653.30	Secure Logistics
Gillette Pakistan	22.00	Nestle Pakistan	128.66	Sui Southern Gas Co
Elahi Cotton	19.64	Hoechst Pakistan	62.89	PIBT
J.K. Spinning Mills	16.05	Rafhan Maize	52.44	Worldcall Telecom

(Share values in rupees)

* Volume in millions of traded shares

INDICATORS		Monday	Previous	Change
KSE 100-SHARE INDEX (Points)		148,815.31	149,493.06	▼ 677.75
KSE 30-SHARE INDEX (Points)		45,206.45	45,518.40	▼ 311.96
MARKET CAPITAL (Rs billion)		17,662.172	17,735.742	▼ 73.569
TRADING VALUE (Rs billion)		26.343	40.450	▼ 14.107

Topline Securities reported that the bourse began the "rollover week" on a volatile note. After hitting an intraday high of 586 points, the index dropped sharply by 735 points, closing at 148,815—down by 677

points, or 0.45 per cent. Investors opted for cautious trading, booking gains amid the uncertainty.

On the sectoral front, stocks like Bank Alfalah, National Bank, The Searle Company, and Pakistan

Aluminium Beverage Cans Ltd helped support the index, contributing a combined 92 points. However, losses in key stocks such as Bank Al-Habib, Systems Ltd, Meezan Bank, Habib Bank, and Lucky Cement

dragged the index lower by 394 points.

Investor participation showed a marked decline, with trading volume falling 13.55pc to 693.3 million shares. The trade value also decreased significantly by 34.87pc to

Rs26.3 billion. Kohinoor Spinning Mills OM led the volume chart, with 113.8 million shares changing hands.

Ali Najib, Deputy Head of Trading at Arif Habib Ltd, noted that the market had started the session with strong momentum, as the KSE-100 index briefly touched 150,080, up 587 points. However, investor sentiment soured following comments from the finance minister regarding Pakistan's risk of slipping back into the FATF grey list. The warning came as nearly 15pc of the population engages in unregulated digital transactions, which could invite global scrutiny and affect the country's financial credibility.

As the KSE-100 index consolidates around the key psychological level of 150,000, analysts predict that selling pressure may continue due to the rollover week. A healthy correction could be on the horizon, with the 148,000 mark seen as a major support level.

Berlin urges to help Afghans stranded in Pakistan

BERLIN: Dozens of organisations on Monday urged the German government to act "before it's too late", to help thousands of Afghans threatened with deportation from Pakistan whom Berlin had previously offered sanctuary.

In an appeal organised by the German Bar Association, more than 50 groups and institutions said swift action was needed to save the more than 2,000 stranded Afghans from being sent back to their Taliban-run homeland.

The Afghans are part of a group previously offered refuge in Germany but now caught between Chancellor Friedrich Merz's tougher immigration policy and a wave of expulsions from Pakistan.

The organisations, including Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders and the Caritas charity, said the government must "drastically speed up" the process of security checks for those who had been accepted under the scheme.

In addition, those who have been approved must be "immediately evacuated", they argued. The groups stressed that those at risk included "lawyers, judges, human rights activists, journalists and members of particularly

endangered minorities".

"Germany bears a special responsibility towards the people who have placed their trust in us and whose commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law has now made them targets in Afghanistan," the organisations said.

Last week, the German government said 450 Afghans waiting to come to Germany had been arrested in recent raids by Pakistani authorities, which have been carrying out a crackdown on Afghans without legal residency.

The German foreign ministry said on Monday it was in contact with more than 200 of those arrested who had been deported to Afghanistan.

The reception scheme was initially set up under the previous chancellor Olaf Scholz after the Taliban's 2021 takeover.

It was intended to provide refuge to those who had worked with German forces in Afghanistan or who were at particular risk from the Taliban.

However, Merz made restrictions on immigration one of his key promises when taking office in May and his government has put the scheme under review.—AFP

Wrongly deported migrant again detained in US

PAGE 10
BALTIMORE: Kilmar Abrego, the migrant whose wrongful deportation to El Salvador made him a symbol of President Donald Trump's hardline immigration policies, was again detained by US immigration officials in Baltimore on Monday, his lawyer said, while facing the possibility of being deported again, this time to Uganda.

Abrego, 30, was deported in March despite a 2019 US immigration court ruling that he not be sent back to his native country due to a risk of persecution by gangs.

Abrego was flown back from El Salvador in June to face criminal charges of transporting migrants living illegally in the United States. He has pleaded not guilty.

He was released from criminal custody in Tennessee on Friday and returned to a family home in Maryland after more than five months of detention, including time in a mega-prison in El Salvador known for its harsh conditions.—Reuters

France summons US envoy over antisemitism claims

US backs ambassador Charles Kushner in row with Paris

PARIS: The US ambassador to France, Charles Kushner, was on Monday ordered to report to the French foreign ministry after he criticised Paris for what he said was its insufficient action against antisemitism.

The diplomatic row comes with concerns about an increase in antisemitic acts and hate crimes in France as international tensions mount over the conflict in Gaza.

In a letter to French President Emmanuel Macron, Kushner, who is the father of US President Donald Trump's son-in-law, expressed his "deep concern over the dramatic rise of antisemitism in France" and the French government's "lack of sufficient action" to confront it.

France on Sunday evening said "the allegations from the ambassador are unacceptable" and added that Kushner's letter, which was released to the media, violated international law.

In July, Macron said France

would formally recognise a Palestinian state during a UN meeting in September, sparking irritation in Israel and the United States. Such gestures "embolden extremists, fuel violence, and endanger Jewish life in France", Kushner said.

"President Trump and I have Jewish children and share Jewish grandchildren."

I know how he feels about antisemitism, as do all Americans." In a rare move between the allies, Paris said Kushner was summoned to the foreign ministry on Monday.

Kushner, whose son Jared Kushner is married to Trump's daughter Ivanka, was confirmed as France's ambassador by the United States Senate in May.

France is home to western Europe's largest Jewish population at around half a million people, as well as a significant Muslim community sensitive to the plight of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Kushner's remarks tally with those made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has accused Macron of fomenting antisemitism.

On Monday, Equality Minister Aurore Berge defended the French government's record.

"The French government's fight against antisemitism is unambiguous," Berge told broadcaster Europe 1-CNews.

"The issue is too serious. In my opinion, it is too important to be used as a diplomatic bargaining chip." She also acknowledged the rise in antisemitic incidents in the West.

"I think we have reached levels that are absolutely intolerable," Berge said.

"There is a form of antisemitism in the air that is taking hold in all our democracies and that we are fighting against," Berge said.

US backs Kushner

"We stand by his comments," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said. "Ambassador Kushner is our US government representative in France and is doing a great job advancing our national interests in that role."

France condemned the ambassador's letter, but noted: "The rise in anti-Semitic acts in France since 7 October 2023 is a reality that we deplore and to which the French authorities are responding with total commitment, as these acts are completely unacceptable."—AFP

Bangladesh says ending Rohingya ethnic cleansing a global responsibility

COX'S BAZAR: Bangladesh's interim leader, Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus, said on Monday there was a "moral responsibility" to end ethnic cleansing of the persecuted Rohingya minority in neighbouring war-torn Myanmar.

More than a million members of the mostly Muslim people live in refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar region, most of whom arrived after fleeing a 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar.

"Bangladesh now hosts 1.3 million forcibly displaced Rohingya from Myanmar," Yunus told the aid conference in Cox's Bazar, calling it the "largest refugee camp in the world".

The talks aim to address the plight of

Rohingya refugees and seek the "early, voluntary and sustainable return" to Myanmar, he said, even as fresh arrivals cross over and shrinking aid flows deepen the crisis. "Due to continued persecution, Rohingya continue to leave Myanmar," Yunus said.

"It is our moral responsibility to take the right side of history and stop the armed actors from carrying out their horrible design of ethnic cleansing of the entire Rohingya populace." The talks on Monday come ahead of a UN conference on the crisis in New York on Sept 30.

Yunus said that while his nation was hosting Rohingya refugees, it needed global support. "It is not only the responsibility of Bangladesh, but also of the international

community, to share the burden of the

Rohingya crisis," he said.

Bangladesh faces its own challenges,

emerging from the mass uprising in August 2024 that overthrew the government of Sheikh Hasina, with fresh elections expected in February.

Bleak future for Rohingya

Bangladesh held talks aimed at addressing the plight of Rohingya refugees, even as fresh arrivals cross over from war-torn

Myanmar and shrinking aid flows deepen

the crisis. The meetings in Cox's Bazar took place ahead of a UN conference in New York on Sept 30.

Both Bangladesh and the UN want to pro-

vide stable conditions in Myanmar for the

Rohingya to eventually return. That seems

unlikely any time soon.

"I consistently hear from Rohingya refu-

gees that they want to return to their homes in Myanmar, but only when it is safe to do so," Nicholas Koumjian, who heads the UN's

Independent Investigative Mechanism for

Myanmar, warned ahead of the meeting.

"Ending the violence and atrocities against civilians from all communities in Rakhine is critical for the eventual safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable return of those that have been displaced." But Kaisar's old homeland of Rakhine is the site of intense fighting in Myanmar's civil war, triggered by the 2021 coup that ousted the democratic government.—AFP

French PM's job on the line after call for trust vote

PARIS: France's embattled Prime Minister Francois Bayrou said on Monday his government would request a vote of confidence on Sept 8, seeking parliamentary backing for his battle against soaring public debt.

The move is high-risk for both Bayrou, whose minority government could be toppled, and President Emmanuel Macron, now on his sixth prime minister since taking office in 2017. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen said her National Rally party would not back Bayrou's planned cuts, suggesting Bayrou's government could face defeat in the vote. The announcement came as calls mounted in France to stage protests on Sept 10. Facing the prospect of mass demonstrations and threats of censure from opponents, Bayrou told a news conference the National Assembly would be asked to "confirm the scale" of spending reductions, as the government seeks to save around 44 billion euros (\$51 billion) with measures including holiday reductions.

"I have asked the president, who has agreed, to convene an extraordinary session of parliament on Monday, Sept 8," Bayrou told reporters.—AFP

Trees down, homes flooded as typhoon batters Vietnam

CUA LO: Typhoon Kajiki brought torrential rains to Vietnam's north central coast on Monday, felling trees and flooding homes, despite wind speeds tapering off from earlier in the day.

As of 0900 GMT, Kajiki was on the coast of Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces, with wind speed easing to 118-133 kph from as strong as 166 kph, according to the country's weather agency.

"It's terrifying," said Dang Xuan Phuong, a 48-year-old resident of Cua Lo, a tourism town in Nghe An province directly hit by the storm. "When I look down from the higher floors I could see waves as tall as 2 metres, and the water has flooded the roads around us," Phuong said.

State media reports said power in several areas in Ha Tinh province had been cut off, roofs were blown out and floating fishing farms were washed away. Vietnam had earlier shut airports, closed schools, and begun mass evacuations as it prepared for the most powerful storm so far this year.

The government warned earlier of "an extremely dangerous fast-moving storm," adding

that Kajiki would bring heavy rains, flooding and landslides. With a long coastline facing the South China Sea, Vietnam is prone to storms that are often deadly and trigger dangerous flooding and mudslides.

The weather agency said rainfall could reach 500 millimetres from Monday afternoon until the end of Tuesday in several parts of northern Vietnam. The Vietnamese government said earlier on Monday about 30,000 people had been evacuated from coastal areas. More than 16,500 soldiers and 107,000 paramilitary personnel had been mobilised to help with the evacuation and stand by for search and rescue.

Two airports in Thanh Hoa and Quang Binh provinces were closed, according to the Civil Aviation Authority of Vietnam. Vietnam Airlines and Vietjet cancelled dozens of flights to and from the area on Sunday and Monday.

Kajiki skirted the southern coast of China's Hainan Island on Sunday as it moved toward Vietnam, forcing Sanya City on the island to close businesses and public transport on Sunday.—Reuters



WAVES approach a beach while Typhoon Kajiki approaches Vietnam's Nghe An province. —Reuters

Human ancestor Lucy gets first European showing in Prague

PRAGUE: The 3.18-million-year-old bone fragments of human ancestor Lucy, which rarely leave Ethiopia, went on display in Prague on Monday, with the Czech prime minister hailing the fossils' "first ever" showing in Europe.

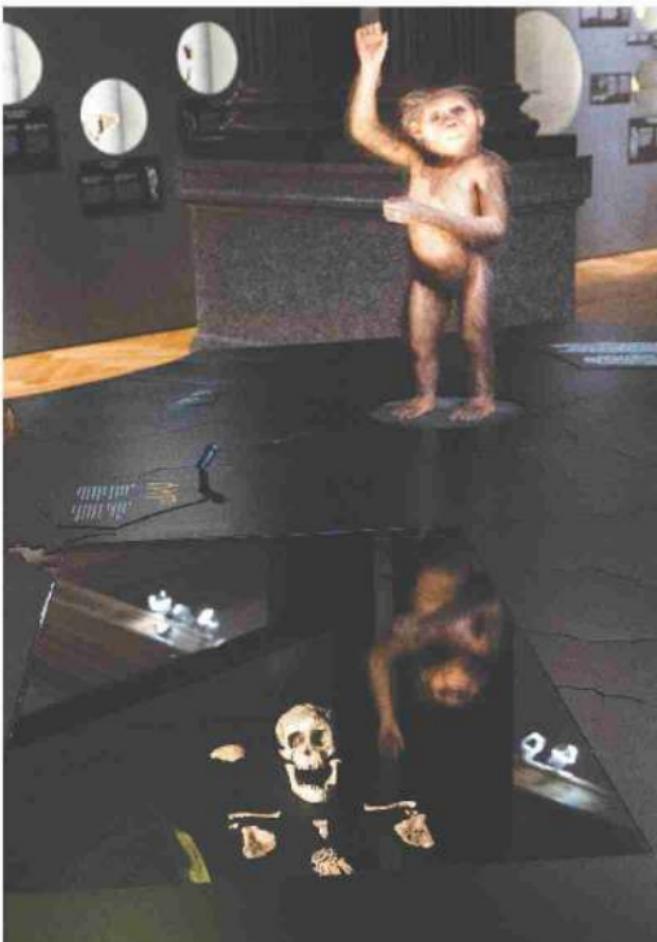
The ancient remains of the *Australopithecus afarensis* were discovered in Ethiopia in 1974. The find was, at the time, the most complete ever made and revolutionised the understanding of humanity's ancestors.

At the Czech National Museum, Lucy's remains are presented alongside Selam, the fossil of a baby *Australopithecus* who lived about 100,000 years earlier than Lucy and was found in the same place 25 years later.

The fossils lent by Ethiopia's National Museum in Addis Ababa landed in Prague on August 15, under stringent security measures. "Both skeletons rank among the most precious exhibits of the global heritage... they are exhibited in a European country for the first time ever," Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said at the ceremonial opening with a military brass band.

Ethiopian Tourism Minister Selamawit Kassa said the exhibition was unique in that Lucy and Selam were displayed

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A RECONSTRUCTED model of one of the oldest human ancestors on display at the National Museum in Prague.—Reuters

together for the first time, "outside of Ethiopia of course". "Ethiopia stands unparalleled for its continuous fossil record of human ancestors spanning six mil-

lion years, with 14 specimens of human ancestors from *Australopithecus* to *Homo sapiens* discovered in Ethiopia," she added. —AFP

Hezbollah rejects disarmament ahead of US-Lebanon talks

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- Netanyahu offers ‘phased’ withdrawal if Lebanon disarms the armed group • UN Security Council vote on embattled peacekeepers delayed

B E I R U T / U N I T E D N A T I O N S: Hezbollah’s chief on Monday doubled down on his refusal to give up the group’s weapons ahead of talks between Lebanese officials and visiting US envoys after Lebanon’s government opted to disarm the Iran-backed fighters.

“We will not give up the weapons that protect us from attack,” Naim Qassem said in a televised address. Qassem urged the Lebanese government to reverse the decision, saying “it was made under US-Israeli dictates”, and accused Washington of wanting to “wreck Lebanon”.

US envoys Thomas Barrack and Morgan Ortagus are to meet Lebanese officials on Tuesday.

“These weapons are our soul, our honour, our land, our dignity, our children’s future,” he said, adding: “Whoever wants to take away these weapons wants to take away our souls.”

Under heavy US pressure and fears of Israel expanding its military action, Lebanon’s government this month tasked the army with drawing up a plan to disarm Hezbollah by the end of the year.

Hezbollah was the only faction that kept its weapons after Lebanon’s 1975-1990 civil war, doing so in the name of “resistance” against Israel, and has repeatedly rejected the decision.

The move came after the balance of power in Lebanon shifted following

more than a year of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah that left the group badly weakened.

Qassem rejected comments by Barrack earlier this month when the US envoy spoke of a “step-by-step approach” to commitments under the November truce. “There is no step for step,” the Hezbollah chief said. “Let them implement the (ceasefire) agreement... then after that we will discuss the defense strategy,” he added.

Hezbollah insists Israel must withdraw, stop its ongoing attacks on Lebanon, release Leba-



HEZBOLLAH leader Naim Qassem delivers a statement during a ceremony in Beirut to honour cleric Abbas Ali Al-Moussawi, who passed away last week.—AFP

nese prisoners it captured during the hostilities and allow reconstruction to begin before the group can discuss the fate of its weapons.

Netanyahu’s condition

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday said Israel was ready to back Lebanon’s efforts to disarm Hezbollah and offered “a phased” pullout of its troops if Beirut followed through with plans to seize the group’s weapons.

Following the war

between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah last year, the Lebanese army has been deploying in the country’s south and dismantling the militant group’s infrastructure there. Lebanon has been grappling with the thorny issue of disarming Hezbollah, with the cabinet this month tasking the army with developing a plan to do so by the end of the year.

Despite the November ceasefire that ended the war, Israel has continued to strike Lebanon, saying

it will do so until Hezbollah is disarmed.

Israeli forces also continue to occupy five areas of the south that they deem strategic.

“Israel stands ready to support Lebanon in its efforts to disarm Hezbollah and to work together towards a more secure and stable future for both nations,” said Netanyahu, according to a statement released by his office.

Israel also acknowledged “the significant step taken by the Lebanese government”, according to the

statement. If the Lebanese government follows through with the plan, Netanyahu said Israel was prepared to “engage in reciprocal measures, including a phased reduction of IDF (military) presence in coordination with the US-led security mechanism”.

‘First step’

Later on Monday the Israeli military said in a statement it had “eliminated” a Hezbollah member in southern Lebanon and would “continue to operate to remove threats posed to the citizens of Israel”. Earlier this month, Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem promised to push back against the Lebanese government’s

plans to disarm his group. Last week, US envoy Tom Barrack called on Israel to honour commitments under a ceasefire that ended its war with Hezbollah.

“There’s always a step-by-step approach but I think the Lebanese government has done their part. They’ve taken the first step. Now what we need is Israel to comply,” Barrack said during meetings with Lebanese officials in Beirut. Israeli media over the weekend

reported that Barrack had visited Israel.

Lebanon’s official National News Agency on Monday reported US deputy envoy Morgan Ortagus had arrived in Beirut ahead of planned meetings with officials.

Security Council vote delayed

An expected United Nations Security Council vote on the future of the blue helmet peacekeeping mission in south Lebanon, which has faced US and Israeli opposition, was pushed back on Monday as negotiations continued.

The Council is debating a French-drafted compromise that would keep the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), deployed in 1978 to separate Israel and Lebanon, in place for one more year while it prepares to withdraw.

Talks began last week and it had been thought a vote could come as soon as Monday, but diplomatic sources indicated that a vote would now come by the end of the week. The force’s mandate ends Sunday. In the latest draft text, the Council would signal “its intention to

work on a withdrawal of UNIFIL with the aim of making the Lebanese Government the sole provider of security in southern Lebanon.” Under a truce that ended a recent war between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah, Beirut’s army has been deploying in south Lebanon and dismantling the militant group’s infrastructure there.

The resolution would extend until August 31, 2026 the mandate of the 10,800-strong force made up of Indonesian, Indian, Italian, Ghanaian, Nepalese and other nationalities. It was not clear if Washington, which wields a veto on the Security Council, would accept the compromise language, with a State Department spokesman previously telling this news agency it would not comment on Council deliberations.

The text also contained language “condemning the incidents that affected United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon premises and forces, injuring several peacekeepers” — a reference to strikes by US ally Israel on UNIFIL positions that have caused injuries and damage.—AFP

RSF accuses Delhi of ‘intimidating’ journalists in Manipur

Dawn Report

KARACHI: Journalism is now “a dangerous activity” in India’s north-eastern state of Manipur, global watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in a statement released on Monday.

The state has been riven by ethnic conflict between the Meitei (Hindu) and Kuki (Christian) communities since May 2023.

“Physical attacks, intimidation and restrictions on movement have turned it into a minefield for the media,” the RSF said in its statement.

Disinformation has flourished in this environment, fuelling hostilities that have claimed more than 260 lives so far and displaced over 60,000 people.

New Delhi clamped an internet shutdown in five of Manipur’s districts in June following outbreak of clashes between the two communities.

It accused both law enforcement agencies and armed militias of obstructing journalists from carrying out their duties by seizing their equipment, barring their entry into specified areas and initiating “spurious legal proceedings” against them.

The RSF gave an account of the experience

which several journalists went through in Manipur.

Pukhrambam Jotin Singh, a cameraman working for *Impact News TV*, was attacked by security forces on June 7 while covering a protest in Imphal, the state capital.

L. Kabichandra, a reporter for a TV channel, was wounded when a gunshot allegedly fired by a Kuki struck him. Since then his organization has to rely on a local correspondent to cover Kuki areas. Yambem Laba, a correspondent for *The Statesman*, was abducted from his home allegedly by members of a Meitei armed group on Feb 11 this year.

Afrida Hussain, who works for the *India Today* magazine, had to be rescued by the army from a hotel in Imphal after a mob surrounded it to protest a report on armed clashes between security forces and a Meitei armed group.

She resigned after the incident, left Manipur and said she would never work in the state again.

“Whether perpetrated by armed groups or by security forces, attacks, threats and reprisals against media professionals are unacceptable.

“The authorities must also prosecute all those who attack media professionals,” the RSF said.

US president makes 'provocative reference' before S. Korea meeting

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Monday he hoped to meet again with North Korea's Kim Jong Un, possibly this year, as he held White House talks with South Korea's dovish new leader that got off awkwardly.

Hours before President Lee Jae Myung arrived for his long-planned first visit to the White House, Trump took to social media to denounce what he said was a "Purge or Revolution" in South Korea, apparently over raids that involved churches.

Forty minutes into an Oval Office meeting in which Lee profusely praised Trump, the US leader dismissed his own sharply worded rebuke, saying, "I'm sure it's a misunderstanding" as "there is a rumor going around." Trump said he believed he was on the same page on North Korea as Lee, a progressive who supports diplomacy over confrontation.

Trump, who met Kim Jong Un three times in his first term, hailed his relationship with the young totalitarian and said he knew him "better than anybody, almost, other than his sister." "Someday I'll see him. I look forward to seeing him. He was very good with me," Trump told reporters, saying he hoped the talks

would take place this year.

Trump contended that North Korea has been firing fewer rockets since he returned to the White House on January 20. The president has boasted that he has solved seven wars in as many months back in the job — a claim that is contested — but had been quiet on North Korea despite the unusually personal diplomacy during his 2017-2021 tenure.

Trump once said that he and Kim "fell in love." Their meetings reduced tensions but failed to produce a lasting agreement. Pyongyang rebuffed overtures from Trump's predecessor Joe Biden, which Trump said showed they did not respect him.

But Kim has also been emboldened by the war in Ukraine, securing critical support from Russia after sending thousands of North Korean troops to fight. North Korea has dug in and refused any talk of ending its nuclear weapons programme.

Lee, a former labor rights lawyer who has criticized the US military in the past, immediately flattered his host and said Trump has made the United States "not a keeper of peace, but a maker of peace."

"I look forward to your meeting

with Chairman Kim Jong Un and construction of Trump Tower in North Korea and playing golf" there, Lee told him.

He even cited propaganda from North Korea that denounced South Korea by noting that Pyongyang said the relationship with Trump was better.

Kim "will be waiting for you," Lee told him. Lee was elected in June after the impeachment of the more hawkish Yoon Suk Yeol, who briefly imposed martial law.

The raids denounced by Trump likely referred in part to investigations surrounding Yoon's conservative allies.

Seeking to buy base

Lee spoke through an interpreter, breaking the pace of Trump, who does not hesitate to pick fights with his guests. Trump, who frequently accuses European allies of freeloading off the United States, made clear he would press hard for greater compensation by South Korea over the 28,500 US troops in the country.

He suggested the United States could seek to take over base land, an idea likely to enrage Lee's brethren on the South Korean left.—AFP

Five security men martyred in clashes

Continued from Page 1

number of armed militants attacked the post of an army unit, resulting in the martyrdom of Lance Naik Ali Hasan Jan and Sepoy Nabi Jan. The attackers, however, fled when the security forces retaliated. Later, a search operation was conducted in the region as residents were asked to stay indoors.

Later, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi along with KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, KP police chief Zulfiqar Hameed, FC Commandant Riaz Nazir Gara and other officials attended the funeral of the personnel who embraced martyrdom in Hangu. The interior minister said the sacrifices of the martyrs would not go in vain as he met families of the martyrs.

Mr Naqvi also visited the FC Hospital to inquire about the health of Naib Subedar Kashif who sustained injuries. "You have set an unforgettable example of bravery and repelled the enemy's attack. The way you fought against Indian-sponsored terrorists is highly commendable. We all stand with you and will always remain by your side," he said.

Cop targeted in Jamrud

In Jamrud, a policeman was martyred in a firing incident, police said.

Officials said that armed men targeted Khurshid Khan in Ghundi area of Jamrud and fled. While police were ascertaining the motive for the shooting, they have not ruled out the possibility of a family feud.

Quadcopter strike in N. Waziristan

In North Waziristan's Mir Ali area, a two-year-old boy was martyred and his grandmother injured in a quadcopter strike on a house on Monday.

According to sources, the quadcopter targeted a house in the Barokhel village of Mir Ali. As a result, a minor child, Sahir Tufail, son of Kashif Jan, was martyred and his grandmother was injured. The injured woman was shifted to Mir Ali hospital.

Israeli rights group ^{Page 11}accuses general of war crimes in West Bank

JERUSALEM: A leading Israeli rights organisation said on Monday that it had requested a military investigation into a senior commander over suspected war crimes in the occupied West Bank.

The request comes days after Major General Avi Bluth, head of the Israeli military in the West Bank, appeared in a video in which he called for curfews and encirclements of Palestinian villages.

The Israeli military did not provide immediate comment.

In a letter to the military advocate-general, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) urged an inquiry into Bluth, citing comments and actions it said

amounted to collective punishment of Palestinians.

"We ask you to order the opening of an investigation against Major General Bluth on suspicion of war crimes," ACRI wrote in the letter, which was dated Sunday.

Bluth had said that "every (Palestinian) village and every enemy... will pay a heavy price" for attacks against Israelis.

His remarks, made in a video widely circulated in Israeli media, followed the arrest of a Palestinian man from the village of al-Mughayyir who was accused by the army of carrying out a "terrorist attack" nearby.

In the same video, Bluth added that the villages of Palestinian attackers

could face curfews, encirclements and terrain "shaping actions" with the aim of deterrence.

On Sunday, Israeli bulldozers uprooted hundreds of trees in al-Mughayyir in the presence of the Israeli military.

The army said it had "cleared" the area after a "series of terror attacks originating from that village", adding the vegetation "obstructed the identification of enemy movement".

In a press statement on Monday, ACRI accused the army of having cut down the trees to impose "collective punishment" on Palestinians in al-Mughayyir after a resident carried out a shooting attack.

"For months, lawless-

ness in the West Bank has made war crimes and crimes against humanity part of daily life. Alarmingly, the army has begun to boast about it," the group said in its letter to the army's prosecutor.

"We ask you to order the army to immediately cease all acts of collective punishment, including the destruction of property."

Military Advocate General Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi has so far not confirmed his receipt of the letter.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and violence there has soared since the start of the war in Gaza almost two years ago.
—AFP

Israel kills 5 journalists in strikes on Gaza hospital

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the wounded were being evacuated.

Reuters reported that video journalist Hussam al-Masri — a contractor who was working for the agency — was operating a live feed at the hospital, “which suddenly shut down at the moment of the initial strike”.

A Reuters spokesperson said the agency was “devastated” to learn of Masri’s death “and injuries to another of our contractors, Hatem Khaled” in the strikes.

“We are urgently seeking more information and have asked authorities in Gaza and Israel to help us get urgent medical assistance for Hatem,” the statement added.

A spokesperson for Qatar-based TV network Al Jazeera said one of its

photojournalists and cameramen, Mohammad Salama, was also killed in the attack.

“Al Jazeera Media Network condemns, in the strongest possible terms, this horrific crime committed by the Israeli occupation forces, who have directly targeted and assassinated journalists as part of a systematic campaign to silence the truth,” the broadcaster said in a statement.

The Associated Press said in a statement that it was “shocked and saddened” to learn of the death of Mariam Dagga, 33, a visual journalist who had freelanced for the agency since the start of the war.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate named two other victims as Moaz Abu Taha and Ahmad Abu Aziz.

Later Monday, a sixth journalist, Hassan



(LEFT to right) *Al Jazeera*’s Mohammed Salama, AP contributor Mariam Dagga and Moaz Abu Taha were among the five journalists killed in Monday’s strike on the Nasser Hospital in Gaza. (Right) A media worker holds Mariam Dagga’s bloodied camera during her funeral.—AFP/Reuters

Douhan, was killed by Israeli fire in the Al-Mawasi area of Khan Yunis, according to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and Nasser Hospital.

AFP footage from the immediate aftermath of the attack showed smoke filling the air and debris from the blast on the floor outside the hospital.

A woman wearing medical scrubs and a white coat was among the injured,

Palestinians rushed to help the victims, carrying bloodied corpses and severed body parts into the medical complex. One body could be seen dangling from the top floor of the targeted building as a man screamed below.

Later in the day, a crowd carried the bodies of some of the slain journalists at a funeral in Khan Yunis, with the dead wrapped in white burial shrouds and their press flak jackets resting on top.—AFP

carried into the hospital on a stretcher with a heavily bandaged leg and blood all over her clothes.

Trump suggests Americans 'like a dictator'

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump suggested on Monday Americans would like a dictator as he signed orders to tighten his clampdown on the capital Washington and to prosecute flag-burners.

In a rambling 80-minute event in the Oval Office, Trump lambasted critics and the media as he complained that he was not getting credit for his National Guard-backed crackdown on crime and immigration.

"They say 'we don't need him. Freedom, freedom. He's a dictator. He's a dictator'. A lot of people are saying: 'Maybe we

like a dictator,'" Trump told reporters.

But he then insisted: "I don't like a dictator. I'm not a dictator. I'm a man with great common sense and a smart person."

He deployed the National Guard to Washington earlier this month to counter what he alleged was an out-of-control crime problem, also taking federal control of the city's police department.

Trump said he was considering whether to send in the military to Chicago and Baltimore as he targets a series of Democratic strongholds.—AFP

World's first CO₂ 'storage' opens in Norway

seabed, the Northern Lights consortium operating the site said on Monday.

Northern Lights, led by oil giants Equinor, Shell and TotalEnergies, involves transporting and burying CO₂ captured at smokestacks across Europe.

The aim is to prevent the emissions from being

released into the atmosphere, and thereby help halt climate change.

"We now injected and stored the very first CO₂ safely in the reservoir," Northern Lights' managing director Tim Heijn said in a statement. "Our ships, facilities and wells are now in operation."

In concrete terms, after the CO₂ is captured, it is liquified and transported by ship to the Oygarden terminal near Bergen on Norway's western coast. It is then transferred into large tanks before being injected through a

110-kilometre (68-mile) pipeline into the seabed, at a depth of around 2.6km, for permanent storage.

been listed as a climate tool by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Pakistan needs to make credible progress on HR, labour reforms

EU envoy says crucial trade assessment due in November

By Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: Noting a deteriorating human rights climate, outgoing European Union Ambassador Riina Kionka has called on Pakistan to show ‘credible’ and ‘visible progress’ on human rights and labour reforms ahead of a crucial trade assessment in November, signalling that the EU’s next trade preference scheme will demand stronger compliance.

Speaking to *Dawn* days before leaving Islamabad, Kionka said the upcoming GSP+ monitoring mission, which had been delayed from June because of the Iran-Israel conflict, will scrutinise Pakistan’s record on 27 international conventions tied to the trade scheme, which grants duty-free access to most Pakistani exports.

“Pakistan needs to show more visible progress especially ahead of the upcoming GSP Plus monitoring mission in November,” she said.

“Governance is looking pretty good, (progress on) environment also positive. But labour rights need more work, and human rights remain the most challenging area.”

On human rights, she was blunt: “If you talk to many human rights defenders, civil society activists — and even just live here, like I have for three years — you often see ... a clear degradation. Our monitors read the newspapers. They have networks, they know what’s going on. So, they’re in a position to judge whether things are moving in the right direction or not.”

European lawmakers and civil society, she added, are increasingly vocal about conditioning trade support on rights performance: “Why should we continue to offer this level of support if there’s no reciprocal progress on the values side?”



OUTGOING EU envoy Riina Kionka

Despite what she described as “quiet diplomacy” between EU and Pakistan on sensitive issues like human rights, Kionka has sometimes been vocal on these issues.

“If we can’t support them (human rights activists) effectively because they’re being silenced or intimidated, then we lose a key channel of communication, a way to engage in dialogue and debate,” she said while explaining the reason for taking strong positions adding “civil society is essential to the EU’s human rights policy. It’s how we project values. It’s how we engage.”

The GSP+ programme is a lifeline for Pakistan’s export sector, with the scheme delivering 83pc growth in exports to EU since its inception. But Kionka stressed that the arrangement is “a two-sided equation — one side is trade, which has been very successful. The other is sustainable development and we need to see credible progress on both fronts.”

The EU measures progress towards sustainability through active implementation of the 27 conventions Pakistan has pledged to uphold, covering human rights, labour rights, governance and environmental standards, the diplomat noted.

She welcomed the Senate’s recent

vote to reduce the number of crimes punishable by death, calling it “encouraging”, but urged further movement on freedom of religion and belief, freedom of expression and the right to assembly.

The EU is finalising a new GSP+ regulation for 2024–2034 that will require all current beneficiaries to reapply before the next cycle begins by 2027. The revised framework, Kionka said, will introduce “a more efficient way of addressing ongoing concerns”.

The proposed regulation will give Brussels more flexibility to withdraw benefits in cases of serious, systematic violations including climate and environmental breaches.

“Once the new regulation comes into force, Pakistan will have to reapply and submit an action plan — a roadmap explaining how it intends to meet the required milestones,” she said. “It doesn’t roll over automatically.”

The proposed regulation will also have an expanded list of conventions to include children’s rights, disability rights, and stricter labour inspection regimes. The widened scope and expedited withdrawal mechanism could, meanwhile, make it more challenging for countries with weak compliance to stay in the scheme.

As she departs after three years, a tenure that started after the 2022 floods for which the EU mobilised nearly €1 billion in aid and ends with yet another episode of devastating floods, the envoy pointed to structural weaknesses in the trade relationship.

“About 75pc of Pakistan’s exports to the EU are textiles. There are many other industries that could also benefit from GSP+,” she said, urging diversification and value addition.

She also emphasised the need for political stability and plurality “to get things done and maintain long-term partnerships”, and highlighted the EU-Pakistan Business Network — a platform for European investors — as an unfinished project she hopes her successor will formally launch.

At OIC, Pakistan outlines 7-point path to peace in Gaza

- Dar urges immediate ceasefire, humanitarian access, UNRWA support, Gaza reconstruction • Terms ‘Greater Israel’ plan a direct threat to regional peace

Dawn Report

KARACHI: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar addressed the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Monday with a call to action, presenting seven “urgent and essential steps” for the international community and Muslim nations to halt the Israel’s war in Gaza and secure enduring peace in Palestine.

Mr Dar outlined the plan for both the OIC and the global community to follow to resolve the crisis. The points include an immediate, permanent, and unconditional ceasefire, unfettered and sustained humanitarian access for all civilians, reinforced international support for the UN relief agency UNRWA.

Further points include an end to forced displacement and illegal settlements, implementation of the OIC’s reconstruction

plan for Gaza, a revival of the two-state solution process in line with international law, accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Ishaq Dar also warned that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s remarks supporting a “Greater Israel” threaten regional peace. Addressing an extraordinary meeting of the OIC-CFM, Mr Dar said Israel’s recent provocative statements encapsulate a “growing disdain and absolute contempt” for the international order.

The condemnation follows a report from *AFP* earlier this month in which Netanyahu, when asked by an i24NEWS interviewer if he subscribed to a vision for a “Greater Israel,” reportedly replied, “absolutely,” adding, “If you ask me what I think, we’re there.”

These remarks drew widespread condemnation from the international community. Last week,

Israel’s defence minister approved a plan to conquer Gaza City, while Tel Aviv approved a controversial plan to build an Israeli settlement which would sever the occupied West Bank from East Jerusalem.

“The brazen audacity of the so-called Israeli cabinet, in unveiling its ominous plan to extend Israel’s full military control over Gaza, as well as the Israeli prime minister’s recent allusion to the creation of a ‘Greater Israel’, provides an insight into Israel’s annexationist and rogue mindset,” Mr Dar told the council.

He said that Pakistan fully endorsed and joined a statement issued by 31 Arab-Islamic countries and the secretaries-general of the OIC, the League of Arab States, and the Gulf Cooperation Council condemning Netanyahu’s comments.

“His [Netanyahu’s] statement constitutes a direct threat to Arab national security, to the sovereignty of states, and to regional and international peace and security,” Mr Dar said.

Quoting PM Shehzad Sharif, Mr Dar identified the conflict’s origin. “The root cause of this ongoing tragedy is Israel’s prolonged, illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. As long as this occupation endures, peace will remain elusive,” he said.



JEDDAH: Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar addresses the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers.—PPI

Russia, Iran discuss nuclear plan ahead of talks with Europe

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Tehran to hold negotiations with Britain, Germany and France today

MOSCOW: The Iranian and Russian presidents discussed Tehran's nuclear programme on Monday as European powers threaten to reimpose sanctions on Iran over the moribund 2015 deal.

Britain, France and Germany have threatened to trigger a "snapback mechanism" to reintroduce UN sanctions that were lifted under the agreement unless Iran agrees to curb its uranium enrichment and restore cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) inspectors.

Iran will hold talks with the European trio in Geneva on Tuesday, Iranian state media reported. "On Tuesday, Iran and the three European parties to the 2015 nuclear deal, along with the European Union, will hold a new round of talks at the level of deputy foreign ministers in Geneva," the state television said.

The meeting will be the second since Iran's 12-day war with Israel in mid-June,

during which the United States carried out strikes against Tehran's nuclear facilities. The previous round of talks was held in Istanbul on July 25.

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone call with his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian, the Kremlin said on Monday, in which the pair "touched on the situation around Iran's nuclear programme".

It did not elaborate on what the pair discussed.

The Iranian presidency said Pezeshkian had thanked Putin for supporting Tehran's "right to enrichment" and said Iran was "not seeking, and will never seek to build nuclear weapons".

The two countries have bolstered political, military and economic ties during Russia's military offensive on Ukraine.

Iran has regularly sought to coordinate its position with both Russia and China before key nuclear talks with the United States and Europe during the current stand-off.

Russia's *Kommersant* business paper reported on Monday that Moscow opposed the idea of "snapback" sanctions.—AFP

Modi's educational records can't be disclosed, court rules

Observes something which is of 'interest to public' is different from something in 'public interest'

By Our Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Should the educational qualifications of Indian leaders be subject to public scrutiny? The question was answered in the negative by the Delhi High Court on Monday, which quashed the Central Information Commission's 2016 order permitting a RTI activist to look at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's B.A. records, assuming the records exist.

The court quashed the order that would have enabled the RTI activist to inspect Delhi University's 1978 B.A. records, the year Narendra Modi graduated, *The Hindu* said.

"Something which is of interest to the public" is quite different from "something which is in the public interest", Justice Sachin Dutta remarked as he set aside the CIC's Dec 21, 2016 order.

In the 175-page combined judgement, Justice Datta also ruled against the CIC's order asking the CBSE to share Class X and XII records of BJP leader Smriti Irani to a

RTI applicant, saying, "there is no implicit public interest in respect of the information sought."

Mr Modi has been quoted as giving different accounts of his educational qualifications, but it is baffling why his claim of being a graduate should not be verified on behalf of a curious public.

On the RTI plea of activist Neeraj, the CIC had ordered Delhi University (DU) to allow inspection of its register containing details of all students who passed the B.A. examination in 1978 — including their roll numbers, names, fathers' names and marks — and to provide certified extracts of the relevant pages.

After the DU challenged the CIC's order, the court stayed it on the very first hearing, Jan 24, 2017.

In its plea, the DU had contended that it cannot reveal details of personal information of all students, who had appeared in Bachelor of Arts in the year 1978, the year Mr Modi cleared the degree.

The DU had argued that the information of students is held in "fiduciary capacity, the same is exempt from disclosure" under the RTI Act. The university said the CIC order had "far-reaching adverse consequences" for all universities that held degrees of crores of students.

Justice Dutta agreed with the DU's conten-

tion, noting the "court cannot be oblivious to the reality that what may superficially appear to be an innocuous or isolated disclosure could open the floodgates of indiscriminate demands, motivated by idle curiosity or sensationalism, rather than any objective "public interest" consideration."

"The fact that the information sought pertains to a public figure does not extinguish privacy/confidentiality rights over personal data, unconnected with public duties," the court added.

Justice Dutta said: "Such data, which pertains to various facets of a student's academic life, is held by the university in trust and confidence, and there is a legitimate expectation on the part of the students that confidentiality shall be maintained with regard thereto".

Previously, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the DU, argued that the purpose of RTI was not to satiate a third party's curiosity.

"Section 6 provides a mandate that information will have to be given, that is the purpose. But the RTI Act is not for the purpose of satisfying someone's curiosity," Mr Mehta had argued.

The CIC, in its order, told the DU to allow inspection and rejected the argument of its public information officer that it was third party personal information, observing there was "neither merit, nor legality" in it.

China's new mega-dam triggers fears of water war in India

New Delhi says Beijing's plans may cut water flow by 85pc in dry season

PARONG: India fears a planned Chinese mega-dam in Tibet will slash water flows on a major shared river by up to 85 per cent during the dry season, according to four sources and a government analysis, prompting New Delhi to fast-track plans for its own massive dam to mitigate the effects.

The concerns were described in an undated Indian government analysis of the Chinese dam's impact, the specifics of which *Reuters* corroborated with four sources and is reporting for the first time.

In December, China announced it would build the world's largest hydropower dam in a border county just before the Yarlung Zangbo river, which originates in Tibet's Angsi Glacier, crosses into India.

That triggered fears in New Delhi that its longtime strategic rival could weaponise its control of the river, known as the Siang and Brahmaputra in India.

New Delhi estimates the Chinese dam, which broke ground in July and will cost nearly \$170 billion, will allow Beijing to divert as much as 40 billion cubic meters of water, or just over a third of what is received annually at a key border

point, according to the sources and the document.

The impact would be especially acute in the non-monsoon months, when temperatures rise and lands become barren across swaths of India.

For example, the major regional city of Guwahati, which is dependent on water-intensive industry and farming, would see a 25pc reduction in supply, the analysis shows.

In response, senior Indian officials have been holding meetings to accelerate construction of the Upper Siang Multipurpose Storage Dam this year, including one organised in July by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office, according to two of the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive government matters.

India's largest hydropower company in May moved survey materials under armed police protection near a prospective site for the project, which would be the country's biggest dam, if completed.

A spokesperson for China's foreign ministry said the hydropower projects "have undergone rigorous scientific research on safety and environmental protection, and will not adversely impact the water resources, ecology, or geology of downstream countries".

Modi's office and the Indian ministries responsible for water and external affairs did not respond to *Reuters'* questions. State-owned

hydropower major NHPC also did not return a request for comment.

The proposed Upper Siang project in India would alleviate the impact of China's dam with its projected 14 billion cubic meters of storage capacity, allowing India to release water during the dry season.

This would reduce the impact on Guwahati to an 11pc reduction in supply, according to the document and sources.

The Indian project could also mitigate any move by Beijing to release devastating torrents of water.

According to the document, the Indian dam would be able to fully absorb any excess water released from a breach in Chinese infrastructure. India is considering a proposal to keep 30pc of its dam empty at any time to account for such surges, two of the sources said.

India's foreign ministry has said that top diplomat S. Jaishankar raised concerns about the dam during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart on Aug 18.

Meanwhile, India has itself been accused by Pakistan of weaponising water.

Delhi this year suspended its participation in a 1960 water treaty with Islamabad and may divert flows from another key river from its downstream neighbour. An international tribunal ruled India must follow the agreement, but Delhi claims the panel has no jurisdiction.

—Reuters